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« Le Carnivalesque comme outil de résistance symbolique pour changement social et politique dans *Léolo* par Jean-Claude Lauzon et *Black Bird* par Michel Basilières »

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Mémoire en littérature canadienne comparée

par

Nouhad Laaroussi

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Ce mémoire a été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes:

Professeur Domenico A. Beneventi, directeur de recherche

Département des lettres et communications, Université de Sherbrooke

Professeur Marc-André Fortin, membre de jury

Département des lettres et communications, Université de Sherbrooke

Professeur Robert Edwards, membre de jury

Département des lettres et communications, Université de Sherbrooke

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RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire examine le film *Léolo* (1992) de Jean-Claude Lauzon et le roman *Black Bird* (2003) de Michel Basilières. Les deux œuvres, bien que différentes, fictionalisent la question de la souveraineté du Québec, la question de la classe sociale ainsi que la question de l'identité, des aspects qui semblent corrélés et entremêlés. L'objectif de cette étude est de faire une analyse du carnavalesque comme mode de critique sociale et politique pour démontrer comment ce mode est utilisé dans ces textes en vue de renverser et défier les structures de pouvoir social et politique existantes. Le carnavalesque, comme on le remarque, imprègne les textes de Lauzon et Basilières; il est stratégiquement déployé par les personnages pour transgresser et résister à l'ordre hégémonique qui entrave leurs désirs et aspirations à la liberté et à l'indépendance. En fait, les personnages, dans les deux œuvres, s'accrochent au mode carnavalesque pour contrevenir aux limitations, à l'oppression et à l'exclusion imposées par un ordre colonial à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de la sphère domestique. Ce mode apparaît donc comme un mécanisme nécessaire de survie qui offre aux personnages - notamment à travers les rêves, les bouleversements et les subversions des hiérarchies sociales existantes - la possibilité d'aller au-delà des limites, des fragmentations, des aliénations et de l'oppression envers un chez-soi/nation troublant. Comme ce mémoire essayera de démontrer, les visions politiques de Lauzon et Basilières, bien que parfois convergent en termes de classe sociale et d'identité, prennent des pistes divergentes sur la question de la souveraineté québécoise. Si Basilières, par exemple, considère le Québec comme une partie intégrante du Canada, le rêve brisé de la souveraineté persiste encore dans le film de Lauzon. En bref, mon analyse sera éclairée par les perspectives de la psychanalytique, la théorie postcoloniale et la géographie humaine

telles représentées par Mikhail Bakhtin, David Sibley, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Mary Douglas et Homi Bhabha.

Mots clés: souveraineté, classe sociale, identité, oppression, transgression, structures de pouvoir

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines and analyzes Jean-Claude Lauzon's 1992 film *Léolo* and Michel Basilières' 2003 novel *Black Bird*. Both texts, though differently, highlight the question of Québec's sovereignty, the question of social class as well as the question of identity that seem quite correlated and intermingled. My focus throughout this thorough study is directed towards the carnivalesque as a mode of social and political critique. The carnivalesque, as might be noticed, permeates both texts; it is particularly deployed by the characters to transgress and resist the seemingly powerful hegemonic order that occludes their aspirations and yearnings for freedom and independence. In fact, the characters, in both texts, employ the carnivalesque to trespass the confinement, oppression, and exclusion imposed by colonial space either within or outside the domestic sphere that is supposed to offer a haven or a cosy environment for survival or a normal growth. The carnivalesque therefore can be seen as a form of critique that enables the characters to defy and go beyond the limitations, the confinements, the alienations, and the oppressiveness inside and outside the home and/or nation. In brief, my analysis of the texts in question will be informed by the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (1965) particularly his definition of the carnivalesque to show how this mode is used in my corpus to subvert and challenge the existing social and political power structures. Other theorists will also inform the analysis of this work such as Michel Foucault, David Sibley, Julia kristeva, and others.

Keywords: sovereignty, social class, identity, oppression, transgression, power structures.

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INTRODUCTION

The question of Québec's sovereignty had been and remains one of the most unsettled questions in Canadian history. What further complicates this intricate issue is Québec's double and contradictory status as colonizer and colonized. The colonial period, as Sourayan Mookerjea, Imre Szeman, and Gail Faurschou explain in their introduction to *Canadian Cultural Studies: A Reader* (2009), began by the establishment of a British government in Québec by the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which has also acknowledged national and territorial rights of Aboriginal people. Canada, in this sense, is far from being a monolithic nation; it is instead a nation that involves a "multitude of nations living under an imperially formed state" (3). Yet, and most notably, resistance to the British colonial system and its policies or measures of assimilation was significant since Québec's conquest in 1759. The Québec Act of 1774 succeeded in restoring New France's "seigneurial system and its religious and linguistic autonomy as a concession to the resistance that emerged in New France against the assimilatory measures of the royal proclamation" (16), but it was during the Quiet Revolution (1960-1970) that resistance to colonial rule was so potent and most effective, for it was ignited by a collective class consciousness and driven by a strong willingness to effect drastic changes in Québec at all levels.

Yet, despite the political fervor, the unprecedented rise of class-consciousness of the 1960s[1], and the ongoing struggle and dream to build a modern, independent nation-

[1] The 1960's also means the rise of Canada's Indigenous rights movement and land claims that called for the right of Indigenous peoples to retain and own their ancestral land as well as participate in managing their resources.

state especially during and after the Quiet Revolution, the province's project of secession from Canada fails.[2] Caught in this somewhat dead-end context, the carnivalesque as a mode of social, political, and cultural critique, proves to be effective, if not primordial, for the Québécois working-class subject in challenging, subverting, and subtly critiquing the status-quo as well as the hegemony of mainstream culture and mainstream ideology. [3] Indeed, the carnivalesque, a term used by the Russian philosopher, semiotician, and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, offers a new world vision and/or truth that is, in André Belleau's words, characterised by "la suppression joyeuse des distances entre les hommes, l'expression concrète des sentiments refoulés, le rapprochement de ce que la vie quotidienne, hiérarchisée, séparait" (96). Through its strategic use of parody and laughter, the carnival tends to foreground ritual inversions of: "1) status degradation; 2) exorbitant exaggeration; 3) inversion of hierarchy; and 4) the comic privileging of the bodily lower stratum, or grotesque body, over the rational and spiritual control of the head" (Stallybrass and White 183).

The carnivalesque, hence, seeks to turn the world upside down and shake essentialist notions around social class stratifications, around the human body and human existence

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[2] The sovereigntist movement in Québec has witnessed a conspicuous decline over the last 10 years. In "The Evolving Parameters of Quebec Nationalism," François Rocher attributes this decline to many factors, such as the successive defeat of the referenda of 1980 and 1995, lack of control over Québec's economy, and the redefinition of the role of the state. All these elements called for a revision and reconfiguration of the "parameters of nationalism" (16). The emphasis was thus placed upon Québec's economic issues, which, in turn, helped maintain the "sovereigntist project alive," including the Meech Lake Accord in 1990 and the Charlottetown Agreement in 1992 (16).

[3] *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (*OALD*) gives two definitions to the word mainstream: "The beliefs, attitudes, etc that are shared by most people and are therefore regarded as normal or conventional" and "The dominant trend in opinion, fashion, etc: the mainstream of political thought."Mainstream is being used in this mémoire to refer to English Canadian culture/society.

itself that is always in a state of becoming and renewal. According to Bakhtin, carnival "celebrates the destruction of the old and the birth of the new world - the new year, the new spring, the new kingdom. The old world that has been destroyed is offered together with the new world…. This is why in carnivalesque images there is so much turnabout, so many opposite faces and intentionally upset proportions" that fade away as soon as the carnivalesque moment is over (Bakhtin 410).

This thesis will thus examine the question of sovereignty in Québec as presented in the following works: Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo* (1992) and Michel Basilières' *Black Bird* (2003), especially, before, during, and after the Quiet Revolution. Through my critical analysis of literary/cultural representations of separatism and class struggle, I will attempt to prove that the carnivalesque, as a mode of social, cultural and political critique, stands out in these texts as an important way to deal with the intricate question of sovereignty in Québec. Concomitantly, this research will explore the issues of social class and class struggle in the province during and after the Quiet Revolution, which are very much present in *Léolo* and *Black Bird* alike.

In this comparative study, I will focus upon the interrelationships between these two distinct modes of cultural expression (literature and film); that is to say, the resemblances between them in terms of style, mood, themes, and their author's political visions. More precisely, my research will attempt to answer the following questions: How is social class and more specifically, the working class, represented in these two works, and how do the discourses of social class intersect with the questions of sovereignty? What is the role of the carnivalesque and the gothic in these texts? Why are these modes used to question and/ or represent Québec's nationalism? Finally, how do these texts engage with postcolonial discourses within the context of Québec's Quiet Revolution and

Québec's nationalism? I will thus be looking at Québec society through fictional representations and from the point of view of those who have been marginalized and excluded rather than those in power - namely, the Québécois woring class. This certainly allows for the logical use of the carnivalesque mode.

Though *Léolo* and *Black Bird* will be the main focus of my research, other works will be explored, including Rejean Ducharme's *L'Avalée des avalés* (1966), Michel Tremblay's *Hosanna* (1973), Heather O'Neill's *Lullabies for Little Criminals* (2006) as they will provide valuable examples and insights into the links between the questions of sovereignty, social class, and the carnivalesque mode of cultural critique. In fact, these texts are significant to my work in the sense that they highlight the carnivalesque as a means to defy and challenge the established values and codes of mainstream society. My corpus will reference other films and literary works, too, including Jacque Godboult's *Les Têtes à Papineau* (1981), Zoe Whittall's *Bottle Rocket Hearts* (2007) and Michel Brault's *Les Ordres* (1974). These works are very relatable to this thesis as they explore both the question of Québec's sovereignty and the issue of social class in the province.

Since I will be analysing two different media (notably a film and a novel), my methodology will be dictated by these two modes of representation. For *Léolo*, I will analyze both the visual and narrative elements of the film, mainly the extensive use of flashbacks and flash-forwards as well as other cinematic techniques such as photography, editing, and point of view. For Basilières' novel, I will do a close reading informed by postcolonial theory, theories of social class, and the carnivalesque. Meanwhile, both the film and the novel will be situated historically through my readings of secondary material on social class and on the Quiet Revolution in Québec.

The Québécois film-director, Jean-Claude Lauzon, was able to fascinate and capture the attention of a very large audience, first through his remarkable film: *Un zoo la nuit* (1987), and then with his second and final feature: *Léolo* (1992) that attests to the film-maker's genius. What makes *Léolo* a unique, avant-garde piece of art is its power of pathos, its ability to affect its audience and transport them into its particular universe, or simply make them sense the pains and agonies of its characters and their helplessness within a colonial space that supresses their yearnings to move beyond their abject conditions. Jean-Claude Lauzon, Christine Ramsay asserts, "creates images and sounds with which he can, in effect, capture his soul on celluloid and, so, profoundly touch his audience. He uses film … more like a membrane than a screen to bring himself and his audience into contact with his autobiographical experience, with what [Laura U.] Marks would call the material forms of his memory, with Léo/Léolo as the spectral copy of his life story" (74). For Pierre-Henri Deleau, Lauzon "annonçait une nouvelle vague, une vague unique qui n'appartiendrait qu'à lui. Il arrivait comme un météorite. Il s'imposait comme un maître…. Un maître qui refuse d'aller faire l'école, refuse d'avoir des disciples, qui rejette le système de par sa nature profondément rebelle" (qtd. in Hébert 33-4). Yet, unlike most of his contemporary film-makers (e.g., Denys Arcand and Robert Lepage) who deploy postmodern techniques [4] in a direct and straight-forward manner, Lauzon

[4]In the period ranging from 1980s and early 1990s, post-modernity comes to the fore as "both an emerging sensibility and a new theoretical distinction" (McDonald 126). In *La Condition Postmoderne* (1979), Jean- François Lyotard associates the new era of post-modernity with "l'incrédulité à l'égard des métarécits" (7). He suggests that 'grand' narratives (ex., the notions of divine creator, Marx's account of historical progress, etc.) which were at the center of systems of knowledge begin to fade away in the second half of the twentieth century due to scientific progress.

"internalized the new techniques as a way of processing a more personal, less openly analytical vision of Quebec" (Pike 147).

Upon its release, however, *Léolo* received equivocal reactions. Though it appalled the Canadian and Québécois public due particularly to its grotesque reality (its shocking scenes of queer sexuality, bestiality, as well as its depiction of childhood in Québec), it was well-received by the Americans, notably American film critic Roger Ebert who affirms that Lauzon's film "contains images no other film would dare to show" ("Leolo" 1993). No wonder, then, that the film's grotesque images were conceived as a real challenge to the image that the nation-state was attempting to forge for itself. The BC Classification Board, Alain Chouinard notes, "confronted with the film's images of child sexuality and bestiality, attributed the rating 'Restricted and Designated' to *Léolo*; this rating was typically reserved for pornographic films" ("Queering the Québécois" 2009).

Nevertheless, and despite these negative reactions, the film has been recognized by many as a "great" film and has won international acclaim. Canadian film critic Brian D. Johnson claimed in his review of *Léolo* "Rebel Masterpiece: A Provocative Québec Movie Arrives in Cannes" (1992) that the film "elevates Canadian cinema to new heights of creative ambition and achievement" (51). He also affirms that Lauzon "writes and directs with a self-assured intensity that recalls the European masters in their prime - such directors as Federico Fellini and Francois [sic] Truffaut" (51). In 2015, *Léolo* was placed in the Top 10 Canadian Films of All Time by the Toronto International Film Festival. What is intriguing, though, is that the film was denied the Palme d'Or in the 1992 Cannes Film Festival, perhaps because it dares to approach the shocking reality of Québécois society and challenge "popular imagination with its incredible imagery and style" (Melnyk 10).

In "Quebec's Next Generation: From Lauzon to Turpin" (2003), George Melnyk affirms that Lauzon's portrayal of his family members as insane (except for Léo and his mother) articulates a latent message about Québec's political situation. As Melnyk explains:

> Léolo's father and mother are obsessed with bowel movements with the father dispensing laxatives weekly in a ritual parody of Holy Communion in order to maintain family health. Léolo's sisters are insane and his body-builder brother lets himself be bullied by the local Anglo thug even though he has the physical power to thrash the fellow. Quebec becomes a universe of mental impotence is Lauzon's biting suggestion. 13

By contrast, in " Drowning for love : Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo*" (2001), George E. Toles' provides a detailed analysis that does not go beyond the literal meaning of the text's strange images or grotesqueries, as he simply associates Léo's escape routes, through either imagination or writing, to his desire to escape his deranged family. Yet, certain questions should have also guided Toles' criticism of Lauzon's work; for example, why does Léo attempt to escape such a family? Why does he refer to himself as someone who does not exist at all? Why all this hatred towards his father? Why does Léo love his mother? What does that mother represent? Toles in fact fails to view Léo's family as an extension of his nation, mainly a nation that struggles for national liberation. He instead describes *Léolo* as the "record of a struggle between two desires: the desire to face bravely and without shame all the ways in which Lauzon belongs to his strangely cursed family, and the desire to void his membership in this family" (295). Toles also stresses that there is "no recourse to the empty utopianism of Bakhtin's 'carnivalesque,' a concept whose seemingly endless applications suggest not so much a daring and difficult regard for our

subversive animal instincts as a sentimental replay of late sixties ' Let it all hang out' merrymaking" (316). I suggest, however, that the effect and influence of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque haunts Lauzon's film. Indeed, *Léolo* portrays the carnivalesque and/or carnival at its very essence; it is deeply entrenched in its aesthetics, its tone, and its imagery. One can thus say that (the exaggeration, comic violence, curses, grotesque bodies, satire, and parody) that are highlighted in Lauzon's film constitute the basic elements of carnivalesque literature. The exaggerated scenes or images of grotesqueries are meant to uplift or give value back to popular cultural forms that are excluded, abhorred, or marginalized; in other words, all that the bourgeoisie has struggled to repress or leave behind to maintain its sense of difference from the low Other. In short, *Léolo* excels at celebrating this mode that seeks to cross the social, political, and cultural limits as well as transgress the boundaries and codes set by the high/dominant culture or society.

Léolo unfolds the semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story of a 12-year-old school boy named Léo Lauzeau, played by Maxime Collin. He is the youngest child of a typically dysfunctional, working class family in Montreal's Mile End district. The protagonist's feelings of alienation and exclusion permeates the film from its opening sequence to its end. Not only does he feel imprisoned within the borders of his own nation, but also within his locality and home, which should normally provide a safe haven or a secure environment for normal and healthy growth. His brother Fernand (played by Alex Nadeau), for instance, is bullied and humiliated twice by an Anglophone; at home, Léo's every movement is controlled by his parents. His father (played by Roland Blouin) goes so far as to control his daily visits to the bathroom. His two sisters Nanette (played by Marie-Hélène Montpetit) and Rita (played by Geneviève Samson) keep vacillating between home and the psychiatric ward where they remain enclosed and isolated from the

rest of the world. His grandfather, played by Julien Guiomar, however, tries to drown him in the wading pool for inadvertently splashing him while having fun and playing with his sisters and brother. Caught in this complex familial environment, Léo resorts to his specific world of fantasy and dreams, to reading, and above all, to daily scribblings to escape his precarious conditions, his alienation, as well as the hereditary mental illness that threatens his existence. Most significantly, Léo rejects his name and his French-Canadian identity in order to adopt a new Italian one. Italy becomes his idyllic dreamland that he associates with liberty and sovereignty; that is, all that he lacks in his own homeland. In short, Léo's lone search for an authentic identity coincides with a strong desire for freedom and empowerment. The carnivalesque, in this regard, especially through its subversive powers of reversal, enables Léo to cherish a sense of empowerment and liberty while being caught in a colonized context that limits and suppresses his freedom.

Black Bird is the first novel written by the Anglo-Québec writer Michel Basilières who, as a child, witnessed the events of the October Crisis (1970) and its shocking impact upon the day-to-day life in Montréal that was abruptly transformed into a real battleground of political and class conflict. Basilières' novel brings to the fore a critical period in Québec's history that saw the emergence of new political powers and radical groups that shared one common goal: Québec's independence. The *Front de Libération du Québec* (*FLQ*) stands out as one of those groups that shocked the whole country through its violent confrontations with the government using guerrilla tactics and a series of violent, terrorist acts to make their voice heard.

Black Bird is a gothic, and surrealist re-telling of Québec during the October Crisis as seen from the point of view of a family of both Anglophone and Francophone characters

living in Centre-sud Montréal. It brings to the fore one of the issues that is rarely approached or spoken of in Canadian history. Yet, what attracts us most about Basilières' novel is that we do not have much information or detailed physical descriptions of his characters. We barely know what they look like or even what their proper names are, except for some characters (e.g., Marie, Aline, Jean-Baptiste, etc.) as he seems much more concerned about their origins, hardships, and their day-to-day struggles for survival in their hostile, and typically strange world. Or, perhaps these characters are named, mostly because they stand in for the new generation that becomes much more conscious of the social reality in which they live, and of the importance of political action to exert real change. The other characters, who are referred to only as Mother, Uncle, Father, and Grandfather, become like icons of people of an earlier historical period; they represent a particular segment of Québec's working-class people who were indifferent, even unwilling, to be involved in political action to lead the province towards a brighter, more promising future.

Mother, as Basilières reveals, is the only Anglophone character within the Desouches family, yet most of the other characters speak English at home despite their francophone origins, except Marie who clings to her francophone heritage and Aline (Grandfather's second wife) who feels alienated due to the language divide that continues to dramatize the separation between the members of the same family. In "Les (af)filiations contestées de la littérature anglo-québécoise" (2012), Gillian Lane-Mercier explores the divisions as well as the uneasy relationship between Anglophone and Francophone characters in *Black Bird* that are closely linked to the political and linguistic divide between the two solitudes. These characters, Lane-Mercier argues, are "scindés en deux parties non coïncidentes, régies par des rapports de force déséquilibrés et inconfortables,

auxquels s'ajoutent des affects négatifs dont la culpabilité, l'humiliation, le mépris et la haine de soi" (32). She further argues that such divisions "suivent des trajectoires non linéaires où prolifèrent les raccourcis, les chemins de traverse et les voies sans issue" (32).

Marie (one of the main characters in the novel) is a key member and leader of the *FLQ*. The novel unfolds with the tragic death of her maternal grandfather by a bomb set off by her own hands. Despite her mother's profound grief, Marie's political engagement and dream of a free, independent nation pushes her to commit new terrorist acts (such as kidnapping, torturing, and murdering James Cross - the British Trade Minister), which results in the adoption of the War Measures Act and the military intervention of the Canadian government in Québec (known as the October Crisis). Marie lives in the midst of an eccentric, middle class family. Grandfather and Uncle are grave robbers: they dig-up corpses and sell them to Dr. Hyde for his eccentric, scientific experiments to overcome the family's perennial struggle with poverty. Paradoxically, Marie's twin brother, Jean-Baptiste, does not approve of her terrorist and/or revolutionary acts as he believes in the power of words and diplomatic means to get his message across. The characters' recourse to carnivalesque behavior (ex., curses, violence, theft, illegal work, etc.) enable them to break free of the fixed and limited set of societal rules.

Questions of social class, exclusion, forms of resistance to class marginalization, and the carnivalesque are central to the present study. My theoretical approaches to these texts include theories of social class, postcolonial theory, and cultural studies. Clearly, this foray into key theoretical texts on social class and cultural studies will help me approach the works in question with a critical and interdisciplinary perspective. Meanwhile, since these works are rooted in Québec during the 1960s and 1970s, a historical and a socio-political approach are requisite to explore the cultural and socio-political context that

underlie their production. I will use Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (1965), particularly his definition of the carnivalesque to show how this mode is used in my corpus to subvert and challenge the existing social and political power structures. In this influential book, Bakhtin re-examines the 16th century French author François Rabelais' novel *Gargantua et Pantagruel* (1567), especially Rabelais' portrayal of the "specific" world of two giants who strive for freedom and liberty in the French countryside and are only governed by, to use Kenneth J. Atchity's words, "the philosophy of Pantagruelism: 'Do as Thou Wilt.'" (4). The world of Pantagruel, as Atchity makes clear, is a "world in which no restrictions on sensual or intellectual exploration can be tolerated; excessive discipline is regarded as evil and inhuman" (4).

In *Grotesque* (2013), Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund point out that Rabelais' text "overflows with facts, faeces, piss, gluttonous feasts, adultery, geese used as toilet paper, sex, cannibalism, cannon balls made from hair, as well as other passages that rely on modes of exaggeration, silliness, crudeness and indecency" (23-4). One might say that the resemblance between Rabelais' and Lauzon's characters is striking. Indeed, much like the characters in *Léolo*, Gargantua and Pantagruel are depicted in their own natural way, "defecting, burping, urinating, copulating [and] eating" (Edwards and Graulund 24). Yet, Bakhtin's concern with Rablaisian images and the folk-culture humor of French Renaissance targeted the "development of the 'carnivalesque' into a potent, populist, critical inversion of all official words and hierarchies in a way that has implications far beyond the specific realm for Rabelais studies" (Stallybrass and White 7). For Bakhtin, carnival, through its power of boundless inversions of the existing hierarchies between high and low, establishes a second world that subtly critiques and parodies the official life that exists beyond carnival time:

> All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal,…. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (à l'envers), of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and un-crownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a 'world inside out.' 11

This thesis is also informed by Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973) especially his notion of the medical gaze and how its power turns the patient's body into a mere object, and his other influential book *The History of Sexuality* (1978) where he discusses the concept of bio-power to illustrate how power is used to discipline, control, and subjugate bodies as well as regulate the population. At the same time, David Sibley's *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (1995) is relevant to my research as he explores exclusionary acts and feelings of abjection in Western societies and cultures, particularly in spatial contexts. Abjection, Sibley asserts, is pivotal to understanding exclusion and Otherness that exists not only at the level of homes, but also at the level of locations, and nations. These spaces are "tied together by media messages, by local rules about the appropriate uses of suburban gardens, by the state's immigration policies, and so on" (90). They are, as Sibley elucidates, sustained by governments and states through laws and legislation to keep the residual Other outside the imagined notion of the nation-state. Sibley simultaneously examines the historical construction of fictional or imaginary geographies that conceives of minorities and a number of others as "'imperfect' … polluting bodies or folk devils" (49). Due to their "threatening" presence, these social categories are placed beyond the center - mainly in the margins or edges of

society as we see in both *Léolo* and *Black Bird*. Both people and places, for Sibley, are involved in this imaginary construction of geographies of exclusion to create a need for the dominant majority (those who are threatened) to alienate and/or separate themselves from "defiled people and defiled places" (49).

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986) is relevant to this thesis, too, for they discuss the Bakhtinian theory of the carnival within a "framework which makes it analytically powerful in the study of ideological repertoires and cultural practices" (26). They are primarily concerned with the interdependence and interconnections between high and low and how these polar structures are prerequisite to effect political change. Stallybrass and White further illustrate that "the 'top' attempts to reject and eliminate the 'bottom' for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is … dependent upon that low-Other … , but also that the top includes that low symbolically, as a primary eroticised constituent of its own fantasy life" (5). The opening lines in *Black Bird* depict an image of Montréal from top to bottom to confirm the high-low dichotomous categories that govern, as Stallybrass and White puts it, "our four symbolic domains - psychic forms, the human body, geographical space and the social order…"(3). Equally, I consider Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) crucial to my analysis, mostly because of her focus on the stranger, the foreigner, or outsider who ventures to live in an alien society and culture that is not his or hers. In Western societies, and throughout different historical periods, this foreigner, Kristeva argues, is subjected to myriads of exclusionary acts and to diverse strategies of assimilation. Kristeva further argues that though such societies "claim to be universal, [they] accept into their midst only those who adopt the same universality;" that is, the same moral codes and values, and the same religious faith (69). Through her

seminal study regarding this inherent fear of Otherness, Kristeva pinpoints that these feelings or fear of strangeness and difference lie within us. The foreigner is "within us. And when we flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious-that 'improper' facet of our impossible 'own and proper'" (191).

I also consider David Leahy's article "The Carnivalesque as Quiet Revolution in 1950's Quebec Fiction" (1992) significant to my research, particularly his focus on the carnivalesque as a means of resistance and transgression of the established social order and, most importantly, as a means of making the folk culture's voice heard. In this cogent, in-depth study of three Québécois novels (Gérard Bessette's *La Bagarre* (1958*)*, Jean-Jules Richard's *Le Feu dans L'amiante* (1956), and Pierre Gélinas' *Les Vivants, les morts et les autres* (1959), Leahy highlights the significant role of the carnivalesque in transforming and subtly critiquing the dominant social discourses of the 1950s, especially during the Duplessis era or what is known in Québec as "la grande noirceur." These novels, Leahy asserts, are authentic examples of the carnivalesque that precipitated the rise of a popular Québécois culture whose voice was suppressed and undermined. As Leahy argues, each of these texts suggests a disparate vision or perspective of Québec's popular culture, notably a culture on its way to assert itself. As the title of the article itself denotes, the spirit of the Quiet Revolution started in the 1950s and reached its full maturity with the upsurge of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s.

Sourayan Mookerjea, Imre Szeman, and Gail Faurschou's "Introduction" to *Canadian Cultural Studies: A Reader* (2009) is equally informative and pertinent to my current study, mostly because it examines the roots of the problematic of national and/or cultural identity within Canada. The authors assume that this issue is rendered more complex by Canada's official adoption of a multicultural national identity and the signing

of new free trade agreement with the United States. This abrupt passage from one empire to another created a real, intricate problematic that occupies Canadian Cultural Studies' scholars to date. Mookerjea et al. argue that "[o]ne of the outcomes of this close material and imaginative connection to the United States would be to leave postwar Canada without a clear cultural identity, even if desperately in need of one" (21). Hegemony, according to these literary critics, has been the "central enabling concept" of Cultural Studies, and so are popular and marginal social movements, since these movements inform our understanding of culture, identity, history, and place (17). The importance of these movements stems also from the cultural transformations and changes that it has generated. Yet, according to Mookerjea et al., these "design changes in the engine of state power … allow us to observe an important feature of the character of hegemonic leadership attempted by the ruling elite, especially as this has been piloted by the Liberal Party, which has formed the government most of this time" (24- 25). Ben-Zion Shek's *Social Realism in the French-Canadian Novel* (1977) is pertinent and informative as well, particularly because it explores the social and political conditions in Québec prior to the Quiet Revolution as well as the rise of a growing class consciousness that advocates real social, economic, and political change in Québec. In *Les Québécois* (1974) Marcel Rioux explains that it is this new class consciousness that constitutes the most positive change in this critical period, for it concerns "l'homme québécois lui-même … c'est le québécois qui … s'est profondément modifié. Il semble bien qu'il ose se manifester tel qu'il est profondément, c'est- à - dire exubérant, chaleureux, expansif, en un mot: 'chaud'" (93-4). Hence, "[l]'affirmation de soi," Rioux confirms, "veut exploiter ce que l'on croit être profondément et essentiellement; elle est tournée vers le present et l'avenir" (7).

This thesis will examine textual/fictional representations that deal with the Québec sovereignty movement as it was in a particular historical moment and its representational form. It suggests a carnivaleque reading of *Léolo* and *Black Bird* and explores the transgressive power of the carnivalesque to challenge hegemonic powers that aim to reproduce and maintain political and economic stasis.

CHAPTER ONE

The Representation of Social Class and Class Conflict in Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo* *and* Michel Basilières' *Black Bird*

The question of social class is foregrounded in both Lauzon's and Basilières' texts to depict and question the critical socio-economic status of the urban-working class, especially in Québec's most populous city (Montréal) in the late 1950s, early 1960s and 1970s. In fact, these socio-economic conditions were the main precursor that alerted the population to reject the oppressive living conditions and strive for drastic and profound transformations within Québécois society at all levels (social, economic, and political). The narrative of Lauzon's film thus directs us towards the bleak reality of his protagonist Léo Lozeau, who lives with a dysfunctional working-class family in the Mile-End neighbourhood of Montréal, wholly ravaged by madness and poverty. Though madness seems the most critical issue in Léo's family, I would argue that social class constitutes the core of all their miseries and isolation from the rest of the world. The close link between poverty and madness in the film might indeed suggest that living in extreme poverty and constant deprivation may engender a kind of madness. Or, perhaps, the recurrence of the theme of madness might insinuate that the hitherto irresolvable issue of Québec's political sovereignty may lead the Québécois society to madness especially that the whole family ends up in the psychiatric hospital.

As a viewer, the issue of social class bewilders me for its static nature within the film. There is absolutely nothing that changes in the family's claustrophobic apartment

situated in one of the most marginalized neighbourhoods in Montréal (Mile End).[5] Its very name denotes the systemic isolation and exclusion of the poor/abject Other far away from the center, particularly to the peripheries or forgotten spaces that are hardly visible. Throughout the film, nothing occurs to break the idleness, monotony, and relative stasis in the family's life that seems to be one aspect of urban working class lives: the same old shabby furniture, the same food, and the same routine. With a pessimistic, sarcastic tone, hence, Léo introduces his home: "Ça, c'est chez moi, dans le quartier Mile-End, à Montreal, au Canada." It is an old, tiny apartment fraught with repulsive smells and impure, polluted air; it is also ravaged by rats, dirt, and filth. Lauzon deploys lighting and camera angles to elicit this peculiar monotonous mood about the setting and the home milieu. It is quite apparent that the lighting oscillates between artificial dim or dark lighting and abrupt natural bright lighting that often breaks in to prey the door open for Léo's alternative world of dreams, love, and hope. Yet, the oppressive mood that reigns in the Lozeau home is constantly juxtaposed with the images of his dreamland (Italy) as an alternative home to compensate for his acute lack of comfort and ease within his real home/nation, on the one hand, and with the images of underwater reverie, on the other. Such images underline an imaginary world totally different from the real world where Léo lives. In those prominent scenes, Léo leaves behind the world of the poor and the dispossessed to embrace a world he strongly aspires for - the world of bourgeois life that

[5] Historically, Mile End is an Anglophone area in the city of Montréal where a diverse number of poor ethnic groups lived and worked side by side, including Jewish, Anglophone, Greek, Portuguese, and French. It is part of the Plateau-Mont-Royal district and has always been a home for successive new immigrants as well as artists, musicians, painters, and film-makers (including Jean-Claude Lauzon himself) who will profoundly mark Québec's culture and history. More recently, the Mile End has gentrified extensively and is one of the most desirable neighbourhoods in the city.

abounds with luxuries, wealth, and abundance. Such visual/narrative shifts articulate a carnivalesque vision that employs different ritual inversions to highlight the complexities of the world.

It is thus in this stifling, confined space that Léo lives under the same roof with his parents, grandfather, his drop-out brother, and two sisters, who keep vacillating between home and the psychiatric ward. Within this cramped and overcrowded home, Léo does not have a private space of his own; rather, he shares with his brother not only the bedroom but also the single, decrepit bed that was used and abused by his parents and grandparents. Yet, despite the fact that Léo has no private space within his home, he is being strategic in creating spaces both real and imaginary where he can be alone to read, write, and explore his sexual desires. Notably, the only outing that Léo remembers from his childhood memories is a day in the park where he played with his sisters and brother on the grass and ate cucumber. Léo even connects the daunting stasis that permeates his life with the dullness and stagnation that he associates with the outing itself. To get to Ile Sainte Hélène, they have to wait for hours for the bus. Such waiting, and the passivity and/or lack of movement, become a salient characteristic of Léo, and, by implication, a characteristic of the Québécois labour force (especially during the 1950s) that did nothing to change their deteriorating socio-economic conditions: “Parce que j’attends le bus et que c’est tout, parce que j’attendrai la semaine prochaine, j’attendrai toujours.” By contrast, Léo’s attention is absorbed by the relentless movements of the boats while he regrets the negative attitude of the Québécois vis-à-vis the intolerable and excruciating material conditions: “On s’ennuie près des quais regarder passer des bateaux qu’on ne prendra jamais.” Lauzon, in fact, uses the imagery of stasis in order to show the lack of class mobility of Léo and his family. But the affirmation that the Québécois “did nothing to

change the status quo" does not take into account the massive changes that came from the Quiet Revolution; clearly they did something and changed things:

> The pace of change after 1960 was breathtaking. The state, not the church, was to be the main instrument for the realization of francophone Quebeckers' aspirations. Education was secularized, and state funding for schools grew from less than $200 million in 1960 to over $1 billion in 1970; Hydro-Quebec became a state monopoly and soon the largest employer in the province; universal health care and a provincial pension plan were introduced; and new agencies were created to provide capital to budding francophone businesses. It was a genuine revolution about becoming *maîtres chez nous*. Clément 162

In his most revolutionary article "La fatigue culturelle du Canada français" (1962), Hubert Aquin argues that these acute feelings of boredom, stagnant passivity, and idleness are linked to the Québécois' sense of inferiority and lack of pride in their own culture as a minority group caught within a colonial space that denies and refuses to recognize the distinctiveness and particularities of their culture. Aquin stresses the importance "d'une culture propre ou du 'fait national'" to affirm their "québécité" and distinctiveness (324). In this regard, nationalism, Aquin confirms, remains "une expression politique d'une culture: dans le cas du Canada français, il s'agit très nettement d'une aspiration à la politique" (310).

In the opening sequences of the film, the voice-over introduces Léo's father in a derisive tone to reveal, among other things, a revulsion that reflects the degree to which Léo hates and abhors his factory-worker father, who first appears in a black/white image sweating and could hardly move due to the heavy material that he carries upon his

shoulders: “On dit de lui qu’il est mon père. Mais moi je sais que je ne suis pas son fils parce que cet homme est fou. Et que moi je ne le suis pas.” Léo hates the image that his father successfully incarnates; that is to say, the kind of work he does, his acceptance in being exploited and underpaid without raising a finger or protesting, without even expressing his wrath or anger at his grim, unbearable situation. By doing so, the father subtly contributes to the maintenance of his own exploitation and his own misery. Léo, in effect, holds his father and, by extension, the urban-working class in Québec, responsible for sustaining the status-quo by simply enduring what must not be endured.

This indeed partly explains why most of the male figures are silenced and denied moments of empowerment or agency over the course of the film (ex., the father, the grandfather and Fernand who is successively bullied by the local Anglophone). It is thus more accurate to say that these figures incarnate the iconic image of weakened masculinity in Québec that reinforces the concept that Québec men are unable to create or lead a nation. In his *National Manhood and the Creation of Modern Quebec* (2017), Jeffery Vacante points out that nationalists during the Quiet Revolution focused upon reinvigorating this sense of weakened masculinity. This “new generation of men, in fact, sought primarily to infuse nationalism with greater vitality so as to rehabilitate French Canadian self-confidence and pride - that is, manhood” (12). The emphatic emphasis upon the “masculine project of personal and political empowerment” is primarily due to the fact that it “represents the means through which the feminized, emasculated, and homosexualized man/nation can reassert his/its heterosexuality” (15). The process or act of decolonisation and reclaiming of power for either man or nation is, then, bound up with reclaiming heterosexual virility, for, as Mary Jean Green notes, “the image of the newly decolonized subject[w]as a virile, heterosexual man” (8).

The father could also be seen as a victim of the capitalist system that seeks to exploit and contain the working class. In *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Michel Foucault explores the mechanisms of regulations and control exerted upon bodies through what he referred to as bio-power or a bio-politics of the population.[6]As Foucault explains:

> One of these poles - the first to be formed, it seems - centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was by the procedures of power that characterised the disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body. The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes…. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population. 139

Capitalism in this sense is contingent upon this concept of bio-power that reflects a primordial tactic of governmentality in Western societies. Yet, strikingly enough, Léo's hierarchical family, and through its excessive control, emerges as a key ideological state apparatus that subtly works to discipline and facilitate the process of socialization and integration in the established social order.

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[6] According to Foucault, this sovereign power over life and death (a bio-politics of the population) is based upon two distinct poles that simultaneously affect each other. While the first regards the body as a machine that must be disciplined through different mechanisms of political power to ensure its integration and docility, the second targets the biological body itself whose rates of births, deaths, and health should be under control to regulate the population and to provide for the healthy renewal of the industrial workforce over succeeding generations.

Though Léo is a school boy, there is no sequence in the film that shows him devoting just a little of his time to his school work despite his mother's insistence. In contrast, he spends most of his free time working with his brother in exchange for money. There is absolutely nothing that he does for his brother for free, even riding upon his brother's back while he exercises: "Il me payait pour que j'asseois sur ses épaules." This echoes, among other things, the values of the capitalist system that penetrate the private sphere of the characters too to the extent that they become part of their daily exchanges. This also echoes the fact that, being caught in an extreme poverty, gaining money turns into an obsession that preoccupies Léo even within the borders of his home. More than that, he seems ready to even endanger his health and life to earn money: accepting to dive in the filthy river is a momentous case in point. Such an act elicits the extreme penury and deprivation of Léo that are dramatized by Lauzon. Sometimes, Léo even steals to get the luxuries he wants (such as buying his scuba diving-mask), which his working-class family cannot afford to buy for him. Léo's struggle with poverty reminds us of Heather O'Neill's protagonist (Baby) in *Lullabies for Little Criminals* (2006) that subtly uncovers the hidden and poignant reality of Baby's complex childhood in Montréal due to a life marked by excruciating poverty. [7]

The physical space that the characters inhabit reflects their extreme poverty as well; most of their furniture is old and decrepit. As the voice-over explains, the furniture was bought from the Word Tamer - a keen scavenger of dumps and rubbish bins.

[7] Baby lives with her alcoholic father in Montréal's most notorious streets (St. Catherine Street, Christophe Colombe Street, and Napoleon Street) that are known by their various strip clubs, bums, pimps, drug-dealers, and prostitutes. It is in these neighbourhoods that Baby will grow up (almost like Léo) with no real role model or guidance to facilitate her socialization and integration into society.

Strikingly, Léo dares to exhibit the hole in his blanket that keeps expanding throughout the film. At first, only his toe can pass through it, but, shortly after, his whole foot passes without difficulty. This telling image dramatizes how Léo's material situation is not improving at all, but only gets worse. At this very moment, Léo decides to act: "Je sens déjà que je dois quitter cette vie avant de m'étrangler dans ce trou."

This relative stasis and denial of social mobility surfaces in Michel Basilières' *Black Bird,* too. Poverty is a recurrent theme that destabilizes most of its characters. The Desouches are struggling to survive to overcome their unending material needs. The whole family lives in an old shabby relic of a home in a marginalized "forgotten blue-collar" (9) neighbourhood in the Centre-Sud area of Montréal. Due to the family's acute financial problems, the characters are trapped within a household that becomes "a fixture in its neighbourhood for several reasons, not the least being the sheer number of years they occupied the same building … in a city where families commonly packed up every July to move across the street or around the corner" (8). This once again echoes the erstwhile notion of stasis that limits the characters' movement and potential.

The Desouches cannot afford to pay the rent regularly since most of them do not have a secure or stable source of income, so they "practiced a game of paying the rent just frequently enough" to avoid being legally removed (8). Yet, though they do not own the house, they nevertheless act as though the house were theirs. They hence feel free to reconstruct walls and strike down others. Basilières' description evokes the family's carnivalesque transgression of spatial limits that subtly pervade their domestic sphere- a space that normally should offer a sense of freedom and liberty:

> Doors were moved, walls were struck down or created, windows bricked up. Staircases added, balconies enlarged or destroyed. All this work the

> family undertook themselves because they couldn't conceive of paying the costs of unionized labour. So the neighbours became used to seeing deliveries of lumber, tools and hammering, not just during working hours, but at all times. 9

Driven by an eagerness to escape the dullness and monotony of their fixed, unchanging lives, the characters themselves engage in launching new projects of renewal, renovation, and reconstruction within their own private space to alter, transform and create new, different spaces that better suit their potentials and aspirations; in other words, they long for a much more comfortable space that allows for liberty and freedom of movement within their own home. This symbolic act of transgression articulates the characters' desire to move beyond the suffocating limitations or boundaries imposed by an already predetermined, fixed construction of social class. Yet, the enthusiasm or fervour that spurs them at the outset of each project suddenly wanes; they end up exhibiting no interest in completing them:

> though each project began with a burst of enthusiasm, as soon as the inspiration had lost its novelty, work slowed to a crawl. Jobs that should have taken a few days stretched into weeks-even months. Simple tasks like putting up a new shelf consumed a week; repainting the kitchen was a month's toil; refinishing the living-room floor had been going on for a year. And there were even unfinished schemes older than Jean-Baptiste and Marie, who by this time were considered adults. 9

In "Re-imagining Trauma: Montréal under Siege in Michel Basilières' *Black Bird,*" Domenico A. Beneventi argues that the home "- as the ostensibly inviolable and privileged site of private identity, memory, and the accumulation of material possessions - is in fact

an extension of nation" (6). The home and the nation, in this sense, are intertwined and one's connection to either of them elicits, as Erin Manning suggests in *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home, and Identity* (2003), a "visceral … desire for attachment and belonging" (xvii). The unfinished projects within the Desouches' household, then, evoke the "larger societal unease within Québec society around questions of belonging, inclusivity, identity, and the socio-political uncertainties of the future" (Beneventi 6).

Such an unquenchable desire for renewal and renovation within the home and/or nation re-occurs once more by the end of the novel, but this time, it is Marie, endorsed by her father's support, who assumes the fulfillment of the unfinished projects both in the house and the basement. Driven by an undue determinism, Marie declares: "'It's time we started working on putting this house in order,'…. 'Let's finish the framework between the kitchen and front parlour so Aline can get through without tripping over something or getting her sleeves caught on a nail. That's where we'll open the stairs to the adjoining basement as well, for your workshop. It'll be less work to combine them'" (232-33).

Basilières at the same time turns our attention to the hardships the family has gone through due to their inability to pay the costs of the heating bills, which result in an immediate cut-off of the utility. One could sense Basilières' subtle critique of the employees of the gas company and their sheer indifference to the risks and dangers to which the family might be exposed, especially at a time of freezing cold:

> The phone calls began again. Father tried patiently explaining that winter was a bad time for them financially, and also no time to do without heating. But like all public utilities, the gas company was heartless; its employees were the kind of uncaring functionaries who do so well in totalitarian

> regimes, precisely because they're able to bury their humanity under their position so completely. They merely follow the rules, as if such abstract guidelines affect only other management decisions and not people. 38

The family members have suffered and shivered from the freezing cold of winter for days; they have no other alternative except wear items of clothing that one normally wears outside the home (e.g., coats, gloves, toques, and layers of warm clothing) to overcome the extreme cold that threatens their lives and safety. Meanwhile, they huddle together around the kitchen table next to the oven door that is left open to provide them with warmth. Aline, however, was seeking whatever excuse she might find to run out of the house in search for warmth in the adjacent grocery stores whilst the crow (ostensibly unaffected by the cold) seems to take advantage of the situation by mocking their human fragility and frailty. "[I]t nonchalantly stared at them all from atop the refrigerator; its head held first at one sharp angle and then another, as if trying to figure them out. In the chilly kitchen, its cawing was like derisive laughter" (42). Most significantly, the crow has a significant role within the narrative since it represents the only "character" that dares to defy the absolute authority of Grandfather.

Yet, despite their successive material crises, nothing seems illicit, illegal, or even impossible for either Grandfather or Uncle who could do anything to survive (ranging from robbing corpses and robbing Frère André's heart from Saint Joseph's Oratory to robbing gas and electricity). Stuck between unpaid bills and a frozen house, the Desouches are urged to act immediately to avoid freezing to death, so Father heads for the public library to steal a book on natural gas, "secreting it in his armpit beneath his winter greatcoat"(39). Then, the three patriarchal figures "pored over the book all day" to devise a way out of their sudden plight (39). Strikingly, however, the Desouches never give in,

but confront their daily obstacles and miseries with outstanding courage and determination. Of course, they are always ready to devise new schemes for survival no matter what the price might be; they hardly care if they break the law, for what matters most for them is survival. Ultimately and after careful thought and despite the numerous risks such an illegal act involves for all of them, they decide to venture into "direct[ing] gas from their neighbour's line into their furnace," which, unfortunately, was their only option to surpass the atrocities of cold weather (39).

Though "welding a supply line to their furnace" did not last for long, the task itself was arduous. It displays to what degree the Desouches are dismayed about their life as a whole (48). For hours, Father "shovelled and sweated in the dark, cold, damp basement," while Uncle and Grandfather silently "smoked with a shovel in hand, or grunted to each other as if over the years they had developed their own system of communicating without bothering to speak full sentences" (43). Uncle expressed his rage and wrath by smacking a rat by his shovel, while Father could not keep up digging the hard grounds; he got a sense that this "illegal" act will bring about their own destruction since he equates the digging with digging their own graves. It is therefore critically important to notice how Basilières foregrounds this key moment of intense tension and psychological anxiety that uncovers not only their utter disillusionment and discontent about their social conditions, but also their inability to endure such conditions any longer:

> 'Christ,' said Father. 'I can't dig anymore, I'm not used to it like you two. What with everything, it feels too much like we're digging our own graves. I'm so tired I could just fall in beside that rat.'

> The others took over. Watching their rounded backs rolling, he stood there for a moment under the burden of their contempt. But he shook it off, and went upstairs to his wife. 44

Since this abject or criminal act involves a violation of social norms as well as a direct transgression of the law that governs civil society, it could thus be viewed as a form of the carnivalesque mode that tends to transgress all limits and all borders. Even more important is Grandfather and Uncle's abject job as grave-robbers that is a defiant transgression of the law and social order. This clearly reflects the links between their "illegal" activities and the carnivalesque as a mode of subversion and critique of social and economic hierarchies. In her discussion of the pure and defiled in her seminal book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Julia Kristeva contends that it is not "lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. … Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility" (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). These most unusual characters dare to dig-up corpses and sell them to Dr. Hyde for further "illegal," scientific experiments. Yet, despite the fact that such a job constitutes the family's only and basic resource of subsistence and survival, it nevertheless remains an act that reveals their disrespect for the law and morality; in other words, this very act implies launching a tacit war against mainstream codes and norms through embracing all that civil society struggles to dissociate from, leave behind, and deny. Kristeva further argues that the corpse is "the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us

and ends up engulfing us" (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). Corpses and death, in this sense, which stand for the inevitable end and decay of human bodies, are an inescapable threat that one could never separate from. No matter how hard one tries, they linger there to remind us of the movement of the human body from a subject to an object position, from something to nothingness, to being a mere object. Kristeva writes:

> corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit-*cadere,* cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object. Kristeva, *Powers* 3-4

What is strikingly intriguing is that Grandfather and Uncle exude no fear or revulsion regarding these cadavers; they instead treat them as though they are ordinary or familiar objects. There is hence a subtle attempt at work within the narrative to render the unfamiliar familiar, or to "liberate the world from all that is dark and terrifying; it takes away all fears…. All that is frightening in ordinary life is turned into amusing and ludicrous monstrosities" (Bakhtin 47) as is the case with Hubert's resurrected body - a body made of conjoined parts. One could thus infer Basilières' trenchant critique of the objectification of human bodies and human parts through Jean-Baptiste's critical insights while visiting the "shrunken heads" at McGill University's museum (94). Though these

human parts are on display to be viewed and looked at, Basilières insists upon stressing their humanity - that these parts once belonged to human people:

> As he'd grown he'd been forced to crouch lower and lower, in order to look them in the face, until finally he now resorted to sitting back on his knees as the only proper way to get a look. It had always seemed wrong to do other than face them, since they were still, after all, human beings. He couldn't bring himself to weave his head about and around the glass case in order to glance behind or above or beneath them, the way others did…. But these heads weren't objects; these heads had real, recognizable faces. These were people. 97

Jean-Baptiste seems not quite at ease about the fate of corpses and human parts. He further wonders whether lost human parts such as Uncle's missing finger and Grandfather's eye cease to be human or not. Do they simply become mere things as soon as they separate from the body?

Basilières' speculations and subtle critique of the public display of human parts is reminiscent of Foucault's critical study of nineteenth-century medicine, especially the power of the medical gaze in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) that turns patients' bodies into mere objects of clinical observation. This penetrating gaze, which Foucault views as a form of violence enacted upon those bodies, becomes so important to further medical discoveries and advances: "But to look in order to show, to show in order to teach, is not this a tacit form of violence, all the more abusive for its silence, upon a sick body that demands to be comforted, not displayed? Can pain be a spectacle?" (84). This same medical gaze destabilizes and throws Marie out of her comfort zone when she lay in Dr. Hyde's cabinet to abort her unwanted foetus. He "explored and probed and occasionally

leaned back and stared in silence, as if considering. … Marie stared. She hadn't yet felt any pain and wondered whether it could be over already. Or had he even begun? Why was he simply staring?" (161-62). Mother, too, was subjected to the humiliations of Dr. Hyde's penetrating gaze for so long to ultimately disclose his failure to determine the cause of her illness. Through his detailed description of Dr. Hyde's thorough examination of Mother, Basilières alludes to the current limitations and uncertainties of doctors who are unable to offer tangible cures that are capable of easing patients' pains and sufferings. This might equally suggest the urgent need for new medical discoveries, scientific researches to develop the health care system in Québec:

> He was thorough. He put on rubber gloves, which he lubricated, and was more thorough. Finally, as she lay with her legs still spread into the air, he simply stood and stared at her for such a long time that she slowly turned completely red; and then, just as slowly, she resumed her natural colour; and then she began to worry. At last he announced he could find nothing wrong with her. Basilières 82

Grandfather and Uncle's eccentric and insecure sort of job (that often begins after dark) becomes even impossible during winter, which simply means that the family's precarious conditions are rendered even worse. The novel, in particular, opens with a melancholic tone that reveals their extreme disappointment and dissatisfaction at the arrival of winter. For both of them, winter means starvation, meagre diets, if not death, due to frozen ground that defiantly and emphatically disrupts and occludes their excessive transgressions:

> Cold and disappointed, the two men began the long walk home. Even if they could have paid for the bus that ran over the mountain, they couldn't

> board at the cemetery gate, in the middle of the night, with shovels and sacks. As Grandfather watched Uncle preceding him, he realized the snow was just as much an impediment to their work as the frozen ground: Uncle was leaving a trail of footprints, and Grandfather must have been too. Basilières 2

Notably, however, the family's appalling and debilitating conditions are foregrounded through the physical space the characters inhabit. The kitchen, for instance, consists of a "worn table, … overpainted cupboards, [and an] ancient, round-edged refrigerator under which linoleum had never settled," whilst the rooms are cramped with old, ragged furniture that was probably bought from a used furniture store or simply scavenged from dumps or garbage bins, since the Desouches always seek to get what they need for free (15). The shabby furniture suddenly struck Father who, while waiting for Angus's cheque, kept dreaming of investing the money in a new business to change his family's situation:

> he looked around at the over-crowded hallways and rooms, at the broken, scarred and second-hand furniture. Couches were draped faded bedspreads to hide their torn fabrics; chair legs were held in place with glue and baling wire; lamps were turned so their cracks and chips would face the wall. He'd always longed to be able to afford genuine antiques instead of junk furniture. Basilières 54

The family fears and worries about their delicate and alarming material conditions. Father had always been scheming and devising new ways to thrive; he never stopped trying different jobs to provide financial security for his family without success. "He'd tried a few things in his time, turning his hand to all sorts of trades and occupations. … he'd tried making badges and ribbons, he'd tried driving a taxi, he'd tried clerking in a bank, he'd

tried being a barber … he had tried everything a reasonable man might do, and failed at them all" (53-54). Jean-Baptiste seeks a tangible solution that would solve their precarious conditions not only on the short term, but throughout their lives. When he gets his cheque from Professor Woland, he ironically wonders what immediate needs it could ease. Could it solve their problems with the bills, the rent, or buy some new clothes and pieces of furniture? The money sounds insufficient compared with his family's acute needs. Put differently, Jean-Baptiste, like his father, aim for a secure income that would dissipate their constant worries and day-to-day struggle with poverty:

> It might ease things for a week or so, even provide some small treats like an early Christmas, but it wouldn't be long before the money was gone and forgotten, swallowed into their lives like a mere drop in the proverbial bucket, and then things would be the same as they had always been. They'd skimp and save so as to limp from one week to the next, never daring to spend an extra dollar, always worried there'd be too little on the plates. No, a single injection of cash would do nothing to alleviate their worries. Basilières 281

The family's poverty is not only revealed through their ragged, shabby furniture, but also through their worn-out, and second-hand clothes: "On the dresser was a small photograph of Grandfather and Grandmother on their wedding day: They were young, dressed as well as poverty ever allows, standing on the steps of a small parish church" (270). To her utter dismay, Aline discovers by the end of the narrative that she had been duped into wearing Grandfather's previous wife's wedding ring and clothes. She realizes that, since the Desouches live off the dead, they hardly bother about disposing of their clothes (especially Grandmother and Angus's clothes) as long as they could be useful to those who are still

alive. The emphatic presence of the dead's objects within the home confirms Bakhtin's suggestion that death is always seen as something open and unfinished. The "unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth, and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements " (26-27). Or, more particularly, those objects imply that the abject (defined by Kristeva as all that is opposed to I) is always present, always "[hovering] at the borders of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and possible dissolution" (Gross qtd. in Sibley 8). They are then constant reminders of death itself, of its ubiquitous presence and, above all, of its threat to our lives.

For Aline, however, the Desouches, due to extreme poverty, countless deprivations, and hardships, feel that there is no great difference between them and the dead. It is true that they are still alive, but, deep inside, they feel that they are not living - they are dead. Does it then matter if they wear the dead's clothes? Would it make a difference if they keep the dead's clothes or throw them out?

> And no one was bothering to do anything with Angus's things; they were still boxed and piled against a wall in the basement, like bricks in the very wall. The Desouches did not honour the dead; they lived off them. They built their lives off the dead, scavenged everything wherever they could find it, feared letting anything go as if to save it up was like saving money, putting away for the future.
>
> But was that a future worth having? To live in the clothes of the dead, eat off their plates, read their books, give their toys to the children? 271-72

Overall, what unites these different works is the characters' endeavour to step out of their precarious material conditions without great success as is the case in Michel Tremblay's play *Hosanna* (1973)[8] whose protagonist's dreams of glamour and prosperity are met with failure and countless deceptions.

Poverty, as depicted in these works, is a closed circle that subtly suggests the oppressiveness and class hegemony of the existing social order that continue to trap the working class within their limited universe. Still, and despite their myriad obstacles and difficulties, the characters insist upon deconstructing and transgressing the imposed boundaries through recurrent dreams of wealth. This tendency to transgress disturbs the traditionally rigid hierarchies between high and low or rich and poor. It also invokes the image of grotesque realism that, according to Stallybrass and White, "is always in process, it is always becoming, it is a mobile and hybrid creature, disproportionate, exorbitant, and outgrowing all limits, obscenely decentred and off-balance, a figural and symbolic resource for parodic exaggeration and inversion" (9). These symbolic transgressions are much present in Lauzon's film, too. Léo, particularly in his world of dreams and fantasy, imagines himself in a better world. He fancies himself a king in Italy's vast valleys; he thus rejects any position of domination or oppression as he affirms himself as the ruler of that alternative land that offers the aspired-for sense of home - as someone in a possession of power.

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[8] Claude/Hosanna (the rural boy of St. Eustache) left for Montréal looking for opportunities and better social conditions to only embrace a series of self-deceptions and illusions on the edge of a city that relentlessly denied him the possibility of social mobility. (See *Hosanna ; La Duchesse De Langeais*. Montréal: Leméac, 1984.)

Dream of Wealth: An Imagined Life beyond Poverty

In *Léolo*, as in *Black Bird*, the dream of wealth and middle-class comfort inordinately preoccupy the main characters. It is important to note here the scene when Léo turns what might be his tragic death in the wading pool into a wonderful scene of escape from his current social-class miseries in search for treasure and wealth (ex., jewels, gold, diamond, large amounts of money, etc.). Once more, the voice-over intervenes to inform us of Léo's ubiquitous concern with wealth (that in turn emphasizes his dream to step out of his working-class miseries) even in his sudden encounter with death: "Je me souviens de ne pas avoir eu peur et d'avoir rêvé à la beauté du trésor. Peut-être parce que je savais que j'étais déjà mort. Je me souviens surtout de la blancheur de cette lumière que je voyais pour la première fois." As discussed earlier, this overwhelming feeling of being dead due to abject social conditions is fetishized in both texts under study. This morbid sense of being already dead urges the characters to exaggerate the exposition of their lives to danger. Accordingly, death is not feared but welcomed and cherished. The white light that Léo sees may be a sign or even a promise of a better life - a relief from the endless agonies, sufferings, and deprivations of his actual, dark world.

Through his vivid imagination and dreams, Léo engages in a symbolic struggle essentially through subverting the established roles and hierarchies of the high culture (for example: riding on his brother's shoulders in a symbolic elevation to a higher social position, his dream of being the king of Italy, etc.). In doing so, Léo destabilizes, albeit temporarily, the current order of a disempowered working-class boy by imagining himself as a potent sovereign king, having total control and absolute power over his dreamland (Italy). Clearly, he fancies himself possessing that romantic land that he most associates with his unattainable love for Bianca: "Bianca, mon amour, mon bel amour, mon seul

amour, mon Italie." Or, perhaps, the unattainable political and economic sovereignty in Québec. Likewise, he attributes royal titles and royal luxuries to his demented sister (Rita) who is depicted (in one of the key scenes in the film) lying, like a queen, on a fanciful bed surrounded by candles, donned in an extravagant nightgown and totally alienated from the real, dark universe where she lives. Léo emphatically calls her "Queen Rita" to express his unquenched desire to move beyond the confining limits and miseries of their abysmal conditions and enjoy life's luxuries. This stark excess and exaggeration of "the low posing as the high, … makes for a carnivalesque grotesque realism that degrades pomposity while it simultaneously uplifts, through inversion, the low material realm" (Leahy 71).

Grotesque and/or eccentric imagery, particularly the exaggerated inversions and transgressions of hierarchy, is strategically deployed to critique and question the injustices and imbalances of power and wealth between the dominant/high classes and the subaltern/excluded Others. It is thus through such bizarre and somewhat eccentric images of grotesque realism that Lauzon uplifts and elevates the conduct that is normally associated with the lower class or those who are classified as being at one with nature. There is a tendency through these transgressions and ritual inversions to blur and disrupt the established limits and/or boundaries not only between the individual and the social, but also between the public and the private. In doing so, Lauzon deconstructs the established binaries between high/low, culture/nature, clean/dirty to open-up new venues of viewing the world.

Léo's excessive preoccupations and unease about the "unjust" social stratifications, inequalities, and divisions are disclosed through an ironic scene where Léo (still a child) was pointing his plastic pistol at the passing cars and shooting them to express his frustration vis-à-vis the rich as well as his father who is regarded as responsible

for his and his family's miserable life: "Je dégaine mon pistolet et tire les voitures. Je regarde dans mon canon et je pointe mon père. J'ai envie d'y mettre un pétard gros comme toute la planète et de lui foutre au cul." Such a scene articulates his critical consciousness of the existing and apparently fixed social disparities. These social divisions and inequalities between the pure bourgeoisie and the defiled/impure Others are, as Mookerjea et al. note, "systematically organized to serve strategies of capital accumulation" (29). In short, Leo's struggle to turn the world upside down through troubling and disrupting the high/low opposition is ingrained in a desire to "impose a counter-view" or a counter discourse that challenges dominant narratives that aim at reproducing and maintaining the status quo (Stallybrass and White 4).

In parallel, these grotesque images stand out in Basilières' text to convey the characters' unease and disillusionment about their dead-end situation. From the beginning of the narrative, the dream of wealth and affluence haunts both Mother's and Father's imagination. But, most importantly, Father was much more concerned about how to turn that dream into reality. Upon learning about Angus's death and the possibility of a will, Father's dream comes to the fore accompanied by a strong will to make it true. He thus aspires to receive a substantial amount of money that would be "enough to make an actual difference, enough to invest or to seed a business with. Not merely enough for a good drunk or new clothes or to pay the outstanding bills, but a large enough roll to gather some momentum and change things permanently for them" (53). It is, however, striking that notwithstanding their old age, Father and Mother's bourgeois dream of embracing and enjoying life's luxuries and leisure is still alive. Admittedly, these characters yearn to leave behind a life of endless worries about financial insecurity; simply put, they aspire to live, to thrive, to prosper in one's life and not only survive:

> they both still had the desire for youth and beauty just as they had the desire for the material things they saw advertised all around them, on billboards and buses, on television and in magazines. Cars, clothes, vacations; blondes, brunettes, redheads. Because there was so little in their own lives, they wanted so much. And they believed that somewhere people enjoyed possessions without responsibilities; people who were younger, thinner, more handsome than themselves; people they imagined they were with when they were together. Basilières 17

Father's new schemes and plans to be rich, however, evoke excess, exaggeration, as well as ambivalence in the sense that they lay bare his indifference and cynical conduct: he plans to open a shop that repairs and sells antiques in Mrs. McCairn's house (his next-door neighbour). The realization of his project relies upon victimizing and exploiting other people who might be (like himself) in a fragile, precarious situation and might be in desperate need of help and support. Notably, Mrs. McCairn is a widow who is responsible for her mentally handicapped son Moonie. Strangely enough, Father seems oblivious of their abject material conditions and determined to move forward with his project and plans:

> That old woman and her son didn't need the huge old house all to themselves, and he would get it from her. … they could live on the top floor, and Father would even give the boy a job, something he'd never had. He'd pay them a woeful small amount of money to rent the entire ground floor as a showroom, and the basement as a workshop for repairs. At first he worried he'd be unable to find real work simple enough for the boy to do. Bah, he decided, he'd merely set him to driving nails into a plank for

> no reason at all, and give him five dollars at the end of each day. Basilières 54- 55

One can thus argue that such grotesque imagery seem powerful in destabilizing the current social order through envisioning renewal and newness. Hence, the emphatic dream of affluence that haunts the characters either in Lauzon's or Basilières' text articulates the actual dream of the Québécois to change the deteriorating socio-economic status in the province through seizing and exerting total control over Québec's economy and natural resources that are still under the control of the colonizer. In this sense, Father's dream and self-determination to run his own business further accentuate the dream of French-Canadians to be, as André Laurendeau puts it, "masters in [their]own house" (qtd. in Vacante 12). At one point, Father imagined himself in a position of leadership "driving around town to visit decorators and other antique dealers and architects and designers, and standing them all drinks and dinners to drum up business. He'd buy himself a fine grey suit with a bowler hat in which to look his best for his 'clients'" (55). His relentless dreams of being rich, however, merge with his real schemes of opening a shop that repairs and sells antiques and the dream of the emergent nation that strongly aspires to be in control of its economy. They simultaneously signal the rise of a new class of entrepreneurs within the French-speaking community to fulfill such a goal. Most significantly, Father's cynical conduct resonates powerfully with Léo's dream of empowerment and feeling of triumph at the notion of exercising that same power and/or control over other minorities (e.g., Arabs and the Jews): "Et quand mon frère sera une montagne, moi aussi je n'aurai plus peur. Et j'irai dans toutes les ruelles du monde dire aux crottés de cette terre ce que je pense d'eux. Malheur à ceux qui ne pencheront pas la tête sur notre passage. Même les

Arabes et les Israéliens auront peur de moi tellement je serai haut debout sur les épaules de mon frère."

Dirt, Filth, and Pollution

In Lauzon's film, Mile-End's streets look exactly like a garbage dump. Waste invades the social universe of the defiled/residual Others who are geographically situated on the edges or margins of mainstream society. Through Léo's and Fernand's bike ride to the St. Lawrence River, Lauzon displays a scenery that uncovers the appalling reality that the Québécois working class was forced to endure for almost a century. Garbage bags, piles of debris, and decayed pieces of unwanted furniture lie on both sides of the streets in such a way that turns these discarded objects into obstacles that hinder the circulation of individuals and limit their freedom. Though far from Mile-End, the river, likewise, is rife with urban waste on its banks; strikingly, the corpses of dead animals and litter float at its surface. These scenes show Mile-End's working class living amidst their wastes and residues; that is, in an unhealthy and a strikingly polluted environment. More broadly, the urban working-class environment underlines the existing social inequalities and the physical spaces that are marginalized through a mapping of cities based, as Sibley suggests, upon "a process of purification, designed to exclude groups variously identified as polluting - the poor in general, the residual working class, racial minorities, prostitutes, and so on" (57).

To the same degree, Léo's domestic environment abounds with filth and dirt. The family lives adjacent to abject animals and excrement as if to insinuate that there is absolutely no discrepancy between them. The presence of the filthy and smelly turkey in the bathroom's tub is somewhat destabilizing, precisely because it is placed in a space that

should be available for the family's daily showers. Immediately after its sudden disappearance, a rat emerges to take its place. Other rats keep wandering in the kitchen's sink, polluting and contaminating the pile of unwashed dishes and utensils. In short, it seems as though the family shares its home with these most polluting animals. Such conditions will undoubtedly expose the family members to real health problems, since these animals inhabit spaces that are frequented on a daily basis.

Léo's father's obsession with the family's daily bowel movements adds to the polluted atmosphere within the house. The voice-over underlines to what degree the father relates his family's health with a daily visit to the bathroom: he distributes laxatives to all members of the family and makes sure that the children swallow them. In a seemingly comic scene, the lined up children open their mouths for the father to verify whether the pills have been swallowed or not. Léo, however, always tricks his father and never swallows them, but gives them to his sister Rita in exchange for guarding his collection of insects. Indeed, Lauzon's portrayal of Léo's family as merging with defilement suggests Sibley's theory that the poor are viewed by the privileged classes as abject: "The separations which the middle classes have achieved in the suburb contrast with the mixing of people and polluting matter in the slum. This then became a judgement on the poor. The class boundary marked out in residential segregation echoes the recurrent theme: 'Evil … is embodied in excrement'" (Sibley 56). Sibley, in fact, equates this tendency to maintain the self pure and defend its boundaries, mainly manifested by the father's excessive control of the children's bowel movements, with a "never-ending battle against residues- excrement, dead skin, sweat, … a battle that has wider existential significance" (8). Kristeva, in turn, stresses the impossibility of extricating the self from those impurities

as they stand for "the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death" (Kristeva, *Powers* 71).

The Desouches' domestic environment is similar to Léo's. Aline, for instance, fails to put in order and clean the whole house, including her own room, which astonishingly abounds with filth and dirt. Notwithstanding her efforts, her room "was still musty, like the whole house. No matter how hard she tried to clean it, it was cramped and closed and mouldy. The house defeated her" (269). Since the outstanding projects of renovations within the house never end, the house itself becomes a source of pollution and dust, especially the basement, where Angus's possessions and piles of old magazines and books are still stacked up. The basement, in particular, becomes a prominent source of pollution and filth since Marie imprisons James Cross there in the tiny room she already constructed for her new victim. She is thus forced to pour the pail of Cross's excrement (the same one used by Uncle to carry Frère André's bleeding heart) into the toilet, so she exposes not only herself, but the whole family to the danger of possible contaminations. Marie's feelings of revulsion and disgust at her unexpected role turn her wild as she suddenly realizes that she has to clean up after him each day, so she poured out all that internalized wrath and rage at him: "Mange de la marde, maudit tête carrée. Calice" (257). The basement in Léo's house is a marginalized space where Rita lives away from the other members of her family and close to a variety of domestic animals. It is a vital source of dirt and filth, partly because it is an abandoned place that is rarely visited by the members of the family, except Léo.

Much more significantly, and as discussed earlier, the living space of the Desouches (either from within or without) is quite similar: abandoned and abused materials are scattered on both sides of the streets insofar as the house is no longer visible.

The invisibility of the house is suggestive of the invisibility and isolation of Québec itself in the North American continent as a minority group whose culture and language is constantly threatened by the far-reaching effect of the culture and language of its gigantic neighbours. Clearly, then, the overabundance of waste endangers the survival of the house and its inhabitants, for the threat of contamination and disease are predominantly present:

> Cars, mailboxes, even the other houses across the way were only vague outlines against the blank landscape. Vehicles large and small lay abandoned at odd angles in the street; trails where brave or desperate people had waded, waist-deep, were smoothing over and filling in; the iron finials of the Desouches' fence, poking blackly out of the drift, seemed to slowly sink and disappear. Basilières 67

As might be noticed, the poor, to use Charles Booth's words, became an "'internal colonial other'" (qtd. in Sibley 56), whose eccentric, deviant behaviour and material conditions constitute the prime cause of their social exclusion.

The Symbolism of the Gothic Mode

The overall atmosphere (either within or outside the Desouches' house) is macabre, morose, and overwhelmingly dark; it is indeed devoid of any signs of a cosy, stable or secure life. Death and isolation are at the centre of everything in the house and the city that is turned into a battlefield of terrorist, violent acts and confrontations with the government. The adjacent Mont Royal cemetery, the digging in the basement, the bombings, Grandfather's and Uncle's work as grave-robbers, the dreary and grey winter, Halloween, Uncle's ghostly dog, and the black bird itself are all harbingers and reminders of imminent death and destruction that threaten not only the characters but also the French-

speaking community at large. It is important, then, to note that Basilières' novel foregrounds Québec's traumatic, colonial past, specifically the 1970 October Crisis that, as Dominique Clément puts it in "The October Crisis of 1970: Human Rights Abuses Under the *War Measures Act*" (2008), "has since become a legendary event in Canadian history" (161) and the rise of the *FLQ* as a radical political group that advocated revolutionary means (the use of arms, kidnapping, and explosives) to make their voice heard and ostensibly set the province free of the oppressive rule and exploitation of its (English) colonizers:

> Hundreds of bomb attacks between 1963 and 1970 can be attributed to the FLQ. Most of the attacks were directed against federal government property (military armouries, mailboxes, government offices), transportation links (railways, bridges), and businesses. Various FLQ cells robbed banks to finance their operationsand armed themselves with weapons stolen from gun stores and dynamitefrom construction sites. Twenty-four sticks of dynamite were found at a broadcast tower of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on Mount Royal (they failed todetonate). On 19 February 1969, a spectacular bombing at the Montreal Stock Exchange injured 20 people. Clément 164

These unprecedented acts entailed an immediate, military intervention by the Canadian Government (the War Measures Act) in response to the *FLQ*'s series of bombings and kidnapping of Québec's two key figures of authority at that time: Pierre Laporte (the Québécois Minister of Labour) and James Cross (the British Trade Minister), which turned the city into a real prison and rendered the colonial reality within the province as a whole much more visible:

> Green helicopters burped out green troops, trucks rolled noisily and brashly through scattering city traffic, and within hours the army had secured all that it cared to secure. … no bus or railway station or bridge off the island was unwatched…. Flashbulbs and tape recorders from around the world descended on Montreal in numbers unseen since Expo 67, because something was happening the like of which had been unknown since1837. Basilières 278

Michel Brault's 1974 film *Les Ordres* expounds the dramatic events that ensued the invocation of the War Measures Act and how Pierre Trudeau's government dealt with the *FLQ*'s excessive transgressions and defiance to civil law and social order.[9] Trudeau's famous answer "just watch me" to a reporter's question about how far he would go to reassert social order revealed the degree to which the federal government could go in its transgressions of civil rights. In this film, Brault questions the excessive violations of human rights, particularly since many of the detained were innocent. In short, the film invites its viewers to reflect upon the ruthless democratic systems that deploy force and power in order to suppress and eliminate those who might threaten their material interests or challenge their will to power. Yet, and most notably, the film opens and ends with Philippe Gagnon's song "La complainte à mon frère" that incites its characters and, by

[9] Brault's docufiction, inspired by testimonies of 50 actual prisoners, dramatizes the brutal, unjust, and random incarceration of more than 400 citizens whose houses were broken into and searched. The detained were held for 90 days without an overt accusation and were denied the right to bail and trial: "Aucun ne fut accusé de quoi que ce soit à sa remise en liberté" (Brault, *Les Ordres*). More particularly, the film chronicles and uncovers the physical and psychological humiliations and torture to which the prisoners were subjected: "Chaque nuit, ils inventent des nouvelles façons de nous harceler, de nous humilier. Tu n'est plus toi- même" (Brault, *Les Ordres*).

implication, Québécois society to endure and move forward in their struggle for freedom and liberty:

> C'était au mois d'octobre à St-Joseph d'Alma
>
> Malgré ma vie est sobre devait se finir là
>
> Au foyer de mon frère viens prendre mon souper
>
> Voilà m'attendais guère à tous vous retrouver
>
> Quand on revient de vie on est plus grands plus forts
>
> Et alors on se rit d'avoir eu peur de la mort
>
> L'espoir vient de renaître à nous de le conserver
>
> Repousser les faux maîtres voilà l'éternité
>
> Combattre les faux maîtres voilà la liberté Brault, *Les Ordres*

These repressive practices and tragic events might explain the predominance of the gothic mode in Basilières' text to further destabilize and problematize the status of the dispossessed within hegemonic systems of oppression. In *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic* (2009), Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte assert that the term "gothic" underscores "the fringes, the unspoken, the peripheral, and the cast aside. It is populated with monsters and outcasts, villains and victims, specters and the living dead" (xv). In essence, Gothic discourses express the "'unhomely' or 'spectral'" legacies of imperialism and globalisation (vii). Such legacies, which come out in the form of "unresolved memory traces and occluded histories resulting from the experience of colonial oppression … [are] readily figured in the form of ghosts or monsters that 'haunt' the nation/subject from without and within" (vii). In this sense, one might argue that the emergence of Hubert on a Halloween night as a kind of Frankenstein monster on the deserted streets of the spectral city that lies under the control of armed soldiers and the

frequent re-visiting of Angus's ghost to his daughter's house dramatizes the lingering tropes of a tense and a strikingly unresolved past. As Beneventi clearly puts it, *Black Bird*'s "gothic re-figuring of the events of October 1970 offer an uncannily accurate portrait of Montréal's texture as a city haunted by its religious past, its linguistic tensions and obsessions, and its socio-political complexities"(3), whilst in Lauzon's film, the haunting manifests itself through Léo's cultural estrangement and identity crisis. His frequent trips or exile to an alien land speak of an acute lack of the comforts of a free, sovereign home/nation.

Indeed, and as might be observed, the key and most outstanding haunting that occurs in Basilières' novel is that of Hubert - the leader of the *FLQ* cell since he stands for the eloquent spokesperson of Québec's political cause and Québec's sovereigntist aims that were never attained. The emergence of gothic tropes in Canadian literature, Sugars and Turcotte assert, is closely linked to postcolonial interrogation and articulation of national identity constructs or national belonging: "[T]hese tropes are used to convey the ways in which the Canadian national project is inherently haunted. In other cases, … to mediate forgotten histories and, in some instances, initiate forms of cultural mourning (signallying a loss of cultural memory/history resulting from colonialism or, alternatively, because of a perceived illegitimacy in one's tenancy of the land)" (x- xi).

Viewed in this way, the recurrence of gothic motifs in narratives of nationhood (especially images or scenes of dead bodies, ghosts, monstrosity, or uncanniness) alludes to the "incomplete resolution of these histories" (x). The symbolic deployment of the gothic and the uncanny are thus valuable in "figuring Canadians' ambivalent relation to the past and present," mostly because they convey feelings of anxiety, uneasiness, unsettlement, or alienation that characterize, par excellence, the postcolonial subject and

postcolonial reality (Sugars and Turcotte xvi). In his remarkable and oft-cited book *The Uncanny* (1919), Sigmund Freud elucidates the difficulty of assigning a straight-forward definition to the term "uncanny," which he considers an ambivalent word. Freud uses Friedrich von Schelling's definition, which is that, the term "uncanny" (*unheimlich* or unhomely) "applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come to the open" (qtd. in Freud 132). Freud suggests that uncanny effects often emerge when the "boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes, …" (150). In *Black Bird*, for instance, the sudden and unexpected encounter of Marie and Hubert (her supposed deceased boyfriend and leader of the *FLQ* who is inadvertently killed in a car accident by the Péquiste Premier of Québec) reflects this uncanny moment that fills Marie with horror and fear. Like Marie, Grandfather has the same impression at the sight of the monstrous figure of Hubert, whose dead body was recently sold to Dr. Hyde, wandering leisurely in his basement. Without prior hesitation, he rushes to kill him with a shovel, but he hits the gas pipes which resulted in the destruction of the whole house by fire. In carnivalesque terms, every destruction heralds the end of an old epoch and the rebirth of a new one; that is to say, destruction is not an end *per se*, but a symbol of birth, renewal and change. The "world is destroyed so that it may be regenerated and renewed. While dying it gives birth. The relative nature of all that exists is always gay; it is the joy of change" (Bakhtin 48).

For both Marie and Hubert, René Lévesque represents the symbol of the "absolute leader of the political side of their struggle, just as they were the military side; like Ireland's IRA and Sinn Fein" (138-39); put differently, they form two entities that complement each other and whose primary goal culminates in attaining Québec's

sovereignty. Still, Basilières' representation of René Lévesque as corrupt (that is, as someone who accepts not to report the accident and leave Hubert's corpse to the police to dispose of, and above all, as a nationalist who sends his children to English private schools) disrupts the image of the archetypal, separatist leader who strived to fulfill the Québécois dream of building a modern and sovereign state in Québec. What is more intriguing, though, is the resurrection of Hubert's dead body by Dr. Hyde, who ironically turns him into a monster - a Frankenstein horror that is set free to wander Montréal's streets to find himself ultimately inside the Desouches' house. Hubert, in other words, was bereaved of all his erstwhile qualities and personal traits as a potent, eloquent, and inspiring leader of the *FLQ*. By the end of the narrative, a shockingly new, alien character emerges: he can hardly move or even remember who he is or what is happening around him. More particularly, he is stripped of speech - one of his most important features that marks him as a prominent spokesperson. In short, he is silenced and could barely express himself. His past accuracy and fluent use of the language has disappeared to strip him of any will or aspiration to power or agency; or more accurately, to occlude his political ambitions and dreams of Québec's secession from the rest of Canada. He thus looked completely aloof, strange, and peculiarly weak exactly like someone made of a "patchwork of scraps as if to match his costume, and he looked innocent and without experience of where he was and what was happening. …he looked so horrible altogether that suddenly [Aline] feared his own family might have abandoned hime some time ago and left him wandering the streets" (293). Hubert is ruthlessly denied power and independence as though to punish him for digressing from, or trespassing the established order within Canada. Depicting Hubert in such a way, mainly as a handicapped child who can hardly move without being aided or supported, accentuates his and, by implication,

Québec's impotence and dependence around the time of the Quiet Revolution. Hubert's debilitating state by the end of the narrative could also be suggestive of Québec's weakness and inability to survive without the persistent support and help of English Canada:

> The toast popped. Grace flew up to perch on the window frame. Hubert handled the toast like a child, unsure of his grip and awkwardly trying to fit into his mouth. His eyes were still downcast, his shoulders hunched over as if he lacked the will or strength to sit up straight, and he masticated noisily and let crumbs fall from his mouth. Basilières 295

The disembodied spirit of Angus not only haunts the Desouches' house, where his personal belongings are still packed in the basement as a testimony of his hovering presence or a denial of his death, but also haunts Mother's mind and comatosed body that is turned inert due to excessive grief. Ostensibly, Angus's ghost re-visits his daughter's house regularly as if to express his sympathy and worries about the telling divisions of a family that rejects dialogue and interactions as vehicles of mutual understanding and intercultural border crossing. Or, perhaps, these visits might reflect his reflections upon his family's lamentable situation and psychological unrest. As might be noticed, he attempts to reach out to them, and more particularly, get much closer to Marie in order to understand her violent drives and cleanse her soul of her secret sense of guilt, but without success: "It was like a barrier keeping him back; it repelled him as if it and he were opposite poles of a magnet" (241). Yet, despite his remarkable efforts, he could not overcome or assimilate the ongoing existing barrier that keeps him apart from his own family: "Why was everyone so hard to reach? Why in hell could he feel so close to these people, his family, and yet ever be unable to reach them?" (241). In a sense, both Angus's

spirit and Hubert's resurrected body signal, as Beneventi elucidates, the return of the "repressed political desires of a failed Québec nationalism" (4).

Such stark divisions that preoccupy Angus are problematized in Jacques Godbout's 1981 novel *Les Tètes à Papineau*. [10] Godbout's protagonist (Charles-François Papineau) is monstrous – "un bicéphal bilingue" – and this represents the uncanny but also the repressed and failed desires for decolonization, as Sugars and Turcott point out. The emphatic insistence upon ghosts, monsters, and darkness in *Black Bird* is further highlighted by Halloween, a " time when the universe or God allowed the dead, good or evil, to circulate without hindrance among the living on earth, and Aline felt closer to her deceased mother. It was the only day she felt able to think the unthinkable: 'If you're so good, God, why have you taken my mother away?'" (268). This special celebration, which itself represents a moment of transgression and liberation from established social codes, coincides with the macabre events of the October Crisis and thus articulates the characters' internalized ire and dismay at the unexpected siege of Montréal. Like Hubert, Aline, dressed in her black outfit, sets out to roam up and down the streets to celebrate with her neighbourhood children trick-or-treating to trespass and go beyond the imposed boundaries of a city laying under siege. Basilières depicts a grotesque and a gloomy scenery that further emphasize the characters' disillusionment and dismay due to the unwelcome presence of armed soldiers on Montréal's streets:

[10] Charles-François Papineau is a two-headed boy: Charles is an Anglophile and François is a French-Canadian. As they grow up, their personal interests, views, and tastes differ immensely; they constantly oppose and contradict one another as they do not share the same visions, cultures, languages, and even tastes. Dr. Northridge suggests a solution through amalgamation. The surgery has given birth to Charles - a new, monolingual being whose memories of French heritage are wholly lost and totally erased.

> Gangs of ragged scarecrows, and zombies with axes buried in their heads or backs, still ran from door to door long after dark. Aliens with glowing eyes and flashing zap guns demanded their tribute, fairy princesses waved their glittering wands and leprechauns charmed; black-masked stripe-shirted robbers held open bags marked with dollar signs; skeletons rattled, pirates set their beards afire, and a Frankenstein lumbered unnoticed through the streets, bleeding at the seams in his flesh and trailing catheters. 279

The novel's introductory paragraph unequivocally articulates a gothic atmosphere that envelops the entire city. Basilières depicts Montréal as a city haunted by the spirits of its dead ancestors, if not by death itself, an "island, placed a cemetery atop its mountain, capped that mountain with a giant illuminated cross and wove streets along its slopes like a skirt spreading down to the water. … its ancestors hovered over the city just as the Church did, and death was always at the centre of everything" (1). Basilières' critical and pessimistic portrayal delineates an isolated or inward city hitherto devoted to its religious dogmas as well as its past political ideologies that are now obsolete. More particularly, such a portrayal is in line with Northrop Frye's notion of the "garrison mentality" (831). A garrison, to use Frye's words, is a "closely knit and beleaguered society [whose] moral and social values are unquestionable" (830). The multiplication of such groups, according to Frye, presents a real danger to the survival of dialogue and communication as integral tools to openness and intercultural understandings. I find it interesting, however, to note how Basilières and Frye's visions regarding these tendencies towards isolation from the rest of Canada somewhat coalesce:

> It is much easier to multiply garrisons, and when that happens, something anti-cultural comes into Canadian life, a dominating herd-mind in which nothing original can grow. The intensity of the sectarian divisiveness in Canadian towns, both religious and political, is an example: what such groups represent, of course, vis-à-vis one another, is 'two solitudes,' the death of communication and dialogue. Separatism, whether English or French, is culturally the most sterile of all creeds. Frye 831

Montréal's geographical setting (namely an island faced with the hostility of a terrifyingly threatening environment characterized by wild snowstorms and significant drops in temperature that keep threatening the life of its inhabitants) further amplifies its seclusion. Such peculiar weather not only nurtures feelings of distance and withdrawal, but it further impels its inhabitants to develop antagonistic relationships towards its surrounding environment and wilderness, especially at the period of early settlement. Nonetheless, as might be inferred, there seems to be no great discrepancy between past and present as the weather continues to shock, baffle, and therefore, insists upon limiting the characters to the suffocating confines of their domestic sphere:

> Overnight began one of those snowstorms that visit Montreal several times each winter, and that people elsewhere find hard to credit. The clouds had rolled in without warning, against all predictions, but brought no lessening of the cold. The wind toppled trees, radio towers and headstones on Mount Royal,…. By morning it was clear the city was already paralyzed; the radio was announcing that all schools were closed, advising people to stay home, and pulling out weather data and statistics designed to amaze and awe their listeners: not since, surpassing even; in contrast to. Basilières 67

The eerie isolation and solitude imposed by the environment underpins the existing divide and impenetrable isolation between the two solitudes, between Anglophones and Francophones, between French and English amidst a family and/or city that lacks unity and agreement amongst its members, which, in turn, invites and sustains stasis and stagnation rather than movement, progress, renewal, or change. The cyclical ending (which ends the novel with exactly the same introductory paragraph that opens it) attests to the recurrence of the same scenario between French and/or English Canadians.

Gothic tropes are also present in *Léolo*. Of course, it is sporadically used to convey the overall mood and tone of the bleak existence of its characters. It is quite evident that the lighting sometimes has the same effect as chiaroscuro - a painting technique that mixes intense areas of light and dark in the same composition. The interplay of these images as well as the prominence given to this bright, natural light that most of the time disrupts the prevalence of darkness within the Lauzeau's home connote Léo's yearning for real change and a better future not only within his own family, but within the Québécois society at large. Still, Lauzon's film foregrounds both a metropolitan city and an apartment that are poorly lit to stress Québec's backwardness particularly in the pre-Quiet Revolution period. More particularly, the emphasis upon darkness could be interpreted as an allusion to the Québec of the Duplessis era. Québec, during this period, was depicted as a "traditional society that was asleep, immobile, closed and turned inward, without plans for the future, a society of 'great darkness' literally offered up to foreign interests" (Létourneau 93).

Léo's apartment especially at the opening scenes is completely dark: all the lights are off since the characters are asleep in their respective rooms. Léo, by contrast, is still awake reading by the dim light of the refrigerator. The film, equally, enhances another striking sequence that imparts an acute sense of gloominess and even fear. During a bizarre

toilet bowel-training, the bathroom is lit only by candles and a flashlight that the mother directs towards the seemingly terrified 2-year-old Léo whose wet, bewildered eyes are fixed upon the strange, filthy turkey that wanders in the bathtub. Léo also uses a flashlight to sneak into his sister's room while all the others are sound asleep. The classical architecture where the Word-Tamer (Pierre Bourgault)[11] lives equally lacks bright light; it is lit by candles to evoke the overwhelming sensation of darkness and backwardness in terms of a distinct cultural heritage and a literary Québécois tradition that best articulate this new Québécois identity and/or voice. Or, it might also evoke a shortage of an adequate literature that records and preserves Québec's collective memory and history. If, according to Pierre Nepveu who argues in "A (Hi)story that Refuses the Telling: Poetry and the Novel in Contemporary Québécois Literature "(1983), "[m]odern Québécois literature was born in the moment it could say: In the beginning, we do not exist," then there remains a lot to be done to move beyond the literary project of 1960s Québec. Overall, this sense of gloom extends Léo's apartment and the Word-Tamer's cultural space to the psychiatric ward and its long corridors that, much like the other spaces, invoke a sense of fear, isolation, solitude, backwardness, and imprisonment.

[11] The Word-Tamer, played by Pierre Bourgault, is Léo's adoptive father and one of his university professors. The actor is the charismatic Parti Québécois activist and a leading separatist orator. He plays a major role in the film as a voice-over narrator. He is also the one who initiates Léo to his world of dreams in order to save him from his family's madness, but without success: "Il faut rêver. Il faut rêver Léolo." He directly reads to us Léo's journal that he daily collects from his family's rubbish bin. His interest in Léo's artistic work might be read as an attempt to document and preserve Québec's collective memory and national history: "Il portait chaque sourire, chaque regard, chaque mot d'amour ou chaque separation comme s'ils'agissait de sa proper histoire."

CHAPTER TWO

The Question of Violence in the Context of Identity Politics

The issue of violence constitutes a major theme in the texts in question. Most notably, the successive acts of violence against Fernand remain a key carnivalesque ritual in *Léolo.* In grotesque realism, for instance, violence mirrors the "funeral of a dying era, of the old power and old truth," which, according to Bakhtin, involves "[b]loodshed … beatings, blows, curses and abuses - all these elements are steeped in 'merry-time,' time which kills and gives birth" (211). Accordingly, the first scene or act of violence marks a turning point in Fernand's life: "Depuis ce jour, la peur avait donné à mon frère Fernand une raison d'être." Despite his failure to defeat his enemy, the act itself entails a positive action for Fernand. Since that tragic moment, which ends up in bloodshed and the breaking of Fernand's nose, he becomes obsessed with his new body-building project, which could be read as the Québécois desire to move the province away from its "figurative state of homosexual weakness and dependence within Canadian federalism" (Vacante 15).

Yet, strangely enough, Fernand's muscular body does not enable him to defeat his enemy, who breaks his nose a second time and without any apparent difficulties. Such a scene, despite its tragic, bloody imagery signals renewal, revival, and rebirth that is the essence of carnival humour or folk humour that "denies, but it revives and renews at the same time" (Bakhtin 11). The incident implies, among other things, the revival and/or emergence of a new Québécois consciousness that is aware of its vulnerable situation and of the urgent need to act. In their second encounter with the Anglo, Léo dares to curse him as he was certain that Fernand has inevitably developed the long-awaited power to crush his enemy without fear or hesitation: "Tu veux vraiment que mon frère t'arrache la face? Pis qui t'fasse manger d'l'asphalte." Léo's deception at his brother's cowardice, however,

precipitates his decision to kill his grandfather whom he held responsible for his family's, and by extension, his own homeland's plight.

Léo's decision to murder his grandfather by the very end of the film marks his first violent act that signals an outlet of his despair and internalized angst against the male figures in his family, which could be interpreted as a means to satisfy his desire for revenge on the grandfather who is seen as a rival in his love for Bianca (his Italian next-door neighbour) on the one hand and his previous attempt to strangle him by pressing his head down the water of the wading pool, on the other. It could also be interpreted as Léo's desire to kill in him the figure or the image of the impotent, illiterate, and ineffectual ancestor of pre-Quiet Revolution Québec; he typically represents the traditional/rural French-Canadians who simply accepted the status-quo. Léo, in this sense, ruthlessly blames him for his and Québec's actual predicament, particularly the overwhelming poverty in which the province is wallowing and the on-going repressive context of colonialism from which the province fails to disentangle itself.

If Léo's infuriated mother did not intervene to stop the frenziedly wild grandfather from drowning Léo by striking his head with a kitchen pan, he would have been dead. Through this grotesque, satirical, and somewhat aberrant behaviour, Léo's mother expresses her love to her child as well as her readiness to save and protect him from all perils. The repetitive acts of violence during this scene are significant, partly because they mark the beginning of the family's regular visits to the psychiatric ward. The film simultaneously underscores other significant violent incidents, especially when Léo's mother smacks his hand for touching the piece of liver placed on the dininng table for fear of contamination. In like manner, she ruthlessly pours boiling water to kill his most cherished "taons" (horseflies) as a punishment for leaving them in the psychiatry ward -

on the bedside table of his senile sister. By doing so, Léo seems to insinuate that there is a striking similitude between those enclosed insects and mad people. The scenes in the psychiatric ward place the accent once more upon the issue of imprisonment, seclusion, and lack of freedom.

The other important violent incident is Ti-cul Godin's grotesque image of perverse sexuality: the rape of the cat, an act which his gang witnesses and supports except Léo, whose critical eyes keep denying the savagery and barbarism enacted upon the disempowered cat. This recurring image of disempowerment invokes Québec's impotence and inability to step out of the mire of colonialism. Ironically, the narrative voice's cynical humour or derisive comment strips Ti-cul Godin of his sexual power and arrogance by emasculating him along with his neighbours, which could be read as a subtle allusion to the colonial reality in Canada as a whole: "La pauvre chatte ne s'est pas défendue. Elle n'avait plus de griffes. Mme Ouimet prenait soin de ses rideaux. Ha! Quelle chance pour toi mon Milou! Ti-Cul Godin n'avait pas Tintin comme voisin."

Another intriguing scene occurs during an English class sequence. Léo, unlike his classmates, is captivated by the omission of John and Mary's genital parts: "Il manquait des détails au corps de John et Tintin." He just could not grasp why those details were absent from "le tableau des organs de John." Once more, Léo ends his scrutiny by emasculating the English: "J'ai cru que les Anglais n'en avaient pas." In *Weird Sex and Snowshoes: And Other Canadian Film Phenomena* (2001), Katherine Monk argues that the American "concept of nationhood is often referred to as 'phallo-nationalism' because it places the male identity … at the very centre of the national ideal" (91). Monk cites Vito Russo who illustrates that "[m]en of action and strength were the embodiment of our [American] culture,…. Real men were strong, silent, and ostentatiously unemotional.

They acted quickly and never intellectualized" (qtd. in Monk 122-23). The "Québécois failed masculinity" is thus closely interconnected with Québec's colonization. Viewed in this sense, the Quiet Revolution and the rise of new nationalism in Québec stress the affirmation of men's virility and heterosexuality as a reaction against "men's supposed emasculation" (Vacante 14). The act of decolonisation, in Robert Schwartzwald's view, "involves the desire for full masculinity and the concomitant destruction of one's femininity" (20). In this sense, Lauzon's derisive comments insist upon denying the colonizing Other a full masculine identity since that colonizer is himself colonized and thus subjected to colonial rule as well.

In "Fear of Federasty: Québec's Inverted Fictions" (1991), Robert Schwartzwald argues that homosexuality in most Québécois fictions has always been equated with Québec's national oppression because it reflects the Québécois failed struggle for independence. It also expresses an undue obsession, a desire for an elusive subjectivity, or as discussed earlier, a return of the repressed that refuses to die. It is this concern with "unified subjectivity that led to a profound sexual anxiety in Québec's anti-colonial discourse" (178). The church, Schwartzwald further argues, played a prominent role in perpetuating the colonial oppression of Québec. The church or the clergy, in particular, is "represented as 'wedded' to the Anglo-Canadian bourgeoisie in a marriage where it takes care of all womanly vocations, while at the same time effeminizing its own sons" (185). There is hence a close interrelationship between this prevailing sexual anxiety that still haunts Québécois narratives and Québec condition as a colonized nation. Homosexuality, in this regard, was tacitly deployed to further strengthen the concept of French-Canadian men's emasculation, which, in turn, would entrap the province in its intricate colonial/imperial context:

> Homosexuality signifies … the presence of an earlier intellectual élite composed or tied to the clergy that entered into a compact with Anglo-Canadian capital to divide supervision over the colonized body of the Québécois; and then as a sign of the absence of an adequate relationship between the new generation of intellectuals and the people. Thus, the 'people' are enlisted through projection as the source for the condemnation of the supposed lack of virility of traditionally nationalist intellectuals who … are culpabilized as the perpetrators of the people's continued alienation and 'false consciousness.' Schwartzwald 180

Scenes of violence permeate Michel Basilières' text, too. The climactic and most astonishing violent scene is enacted by the Black Bird. And yet, one could argue that the torture scene with Marie and Cross near the end is more astonishing. In fact, to have a crow as a pet within the Desouches' house sounds strange and eccentric. Birds, in general, connote freedom and liberty, but Basilères' bird is much more special: it is black, vindictive, and full of secrets and mysteries, and so are all the members of the family. As a reader, the first unusual element that attracts attention is this "most-hated" bird (that is often referred to in many cultures as a bad-omen, or a harbinger of death, misery, and even total destruction). Black Bird finds easy access and a special space within their home, most particularly within Grandfather's bedroom to provoke his new wife (Aline). Yet, to his utter astonishment, and despite the fact that Aline was initially complaining and utterly struck at sharing her own room with the crow, she ends up developing a strong connection with it; it indeed becomes her most faithful and loving friend within that most alien space. Yet, when Grandfather notices her sudden and unexpected relationship with the crow, he

decides to expel it from his own bedroom to find its new space in the kitchen where Aline spends most of her time preparing meals for the family.

Aline might be representative of the status of Québécois women within a patriarchal/sexist society as well as the new generation of women who seem dissatisfied with their imposed domestic roles. Aline's status is quite complex, simply because she is doubly marginalized and colonized; she is first Othered by her status as a French-Canadian woman within an "Anglophone" home and second by her status as a female Other who lacks voice, power, independence, and liberty. Within Basilières' text, she is assigned the role of a servant whose major role consists of cooking, cleaning, and washing to question women's subordination and oppression in patriarchal societies that implicitly continue to exclude women and stifle their voices. Marie herself expresses a bitter dissatisfaction with her society's expectations of her. She accuses all the patriarchal figures in her life of denying her a position of power and leadership, a role that she truly aspires for within her own society: "All of them. The doctors, the priests, Hubert himself. Even her father with his typical male expectations of what she was worth-every one of them had reached right inside her and killed something? Like serving dinner or handing over a business card? " (262).

Aline internalizes her successive deceptions, discomfort, and disempowerment or inability to affirm herself and react to Grandfather's exaggerated cruelties and grotesque behaviour. She even imagines the bird's loud cawing and squawking as an expression of her own stifled bemoaning, as though it intervenes to defend and speak on her own behalf:

> At last a curious thing happened: Aline began to like the crow. She took its squawking as her own complaining, complaining that she was much too timid to undertake herself. Every time Grandfather flinched at a piercing

> cry, she felt as if she herself had screwed up the courage to yell at him. … she ceased resenting the crow's waking her. She ceased to fear it or be surprised by its sudden outbursts. She began to feel relief; the more it cawed, the calmer she felt. Basilières 33-34

The crow (named Grace by Jean-Baptiste) emerges as one of Aline's best companions and allies in a house where she feels a mere stranger and barely at home. As she feeds and takes care of Grace, the latter displays a great fondness for her insofar as it follows her wherever she goes and watches her every movement. Grace (almost like every one who lives inside the Desouches' house) is subjected to Grandfather's ill-treatments and relentless provocations: "So he continued throwing pencils and forks at the bird, or striking out at it with his hand, but always missing, since Grace was as wary of Grandfather as were his wife and family" (61). But, significantly, Grace will not pardon his excessive and rough behaviour for long; it turns his life upside down by its strategic tricks and disconcerting attacks:

> There she could see Grandfather before he could see her; and she often took what advantage of this she could. If he entered the kitchen without his old man's hat, she would defecate on his bald head. If he wore the hat, she would swoop down and snatch it away, and Grandfather would be reduced to chasing her about the kitchen with the broom, swearing and knocking things off shelves and the table top. Basilières 62

This tragicomic incident implies a symbolic act of transgression and rebellion against the "unquestionable" authority of Grandfather - a symbol of the patriarchal figure and Québec's conservative past; it simultaneously suggests degradation, derision, and defiance of one of the key figures of authority in the midst of that domestic space.

Grandfather (the strong, powerful man who is so cruel and rude to almost everyone) is turned, through this farcical and carnivalesque scene, into an object of derision in swearing and chasing away the seemingly hysterical crow with a kitchen broom; his authority is suddenly questioned and debased as he is overpowered by a bird he himself brought home. Ironically, he acts as if he were a child fleeing and avoiding Grace's violent attacks who turns wild due to his exorbitant provocations (and here again we can see how animals as well as nature could keep those who claim power in a state of stupefaction). Taken together, all of these symbolic incidents insinuate the relative and hierarchical nature of power, that power has no bounds or limits between humans, and most importantly, that human power or supremacy could be easily defeated by that of nature.

From Grandfather's first violent confrontation with the bird onward, his former arrogance and free movement in the house are disrupted. He "grew more and more afraid of entering the kitchen and so began to take his meals elsewhere" (50). Yet, Grandfather's refusal to accept the new order that Grace imposes within his own home impels him to immediately figure out how to dispose of it. Most notably, Grandfather's position of power/authority in the house reminds us of the authority of Léo's father as someone who controls everything within the home. One morning, when Aline was not in the kitchen, he sets it free of its cage and drags it out of the house. But disposing of such a bird does not seem easy at all; it suddenly reappears in order to get involved in a fierce and ruthless brawl with Grandfather, which ends with plucking out his left eye:

> with all his weight bearing down on his chest and unable to get a proper footing in his panic, he grabbed at the bird and tried to tear her from his face. …Grandfather's feet slid on the kitchen linoleum as he struggled to brace himself, instinctively squeezing the crow's breast between his hands-

> not to disable her, but as if it would somehow steady him. Breathless, Grace let out a mournful rasp, reached over to Grandfather's red, strained face and plucked out his left eye. Basilières 64

As discussed earlier, fights, curses, and beatings in the Bakhtinian tradition of grotesque realism insinuate rebirth and change. "People were … reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced" (Bakhtin 10). Grandfather experiences a real rebirth; his behavioural conduct and relationship with Aline as well as the other members of his family experienced a momentous change. Notably, he rushes to visit Jean-Baptiste in jail. His unexpected confessions, openness, and willingness to communicate with, or offer valuable advice to Jean-Baptiste (especially at this moment when he was in desperate need of some guidance in his life) signal the birth of a new man - a man that views life with different lenses. For the first time, Jean-Baptiste is allowed access to his Grandfather's past to learn from his life's hard lessons, his hardships as an orphan who should fend for himself though still a child and concomitantly shield himself and his body from the priests' sexual abuse. Taken together, Grandfather's life experiences (mainly marked by deprivations and total penury) are responsible for moulding him into the kind of person he has become. In other words, he himself is a victim who has been subjected to violence and thus impelled to endure the inexorable atrocities of a bitter life. With his new glass eye, Grandfather sees the same world differently: "'It's become a comfort to me in my old age. I can move my patch over the eye I was born with and then with the new eye I can see everything in its best light, when I no longer want to see anything poor or evil" (222). He discovers that deep inside him lie two opposed beings and that through his real eye he could envisage only evil whilst through the new, artificial one he is able to see and appreciate all that is

positive, delightful, and virtuous. During this crucial moment of close self-scrutiny, and self-reflexivity, Grandfather discerns that dichotomies and/or binaries dissolve; put differently, such rigid and inflexible world vision (which project the on-going territorial, linguistic, and cultural divide between French/English Canadians) are strategically deconstructed, critiqued, and confronted in search of a unity of a divided or broken self, identity, or nation. This vision powerfully reminds us of Bakhtin's "grotesque method and its power to liberate from dogmatism, completeness, and limitation. The interior infinite could not have been found in the closed and finished world, with its distinct fixed boundaries dividing all phenomena and values" (44). Grandfather ultimately realizes that such divisions are nonsensical, absurd, and quite meaningless:

> I looked at myself in the mirror while I was wearing the patch, and the part of me that hates the other looked upon the part of me that pities itself.… For the first time I was conscious of both my optimism and my desperation as if they were separate beings regarding one another. I felt both the weight of meaninglessness and the lightness of play, which had always competed in me to dominate my emotions, but which I was only able to experience in their pure states with the help of the patch. Except that this time, at that moment I stared at myself in the mirror, I was not only fully who I am but each separate part of me regarding myself. As if I were regarding my own twin sons, or an earlier me, with both nostalgia and scorn. Basilières 222-23

The other striking carnivalesque acts of violence that Basilières' text underscores are Marie's successive terrorist acts which could be summed up in two major events: the setting of the bomb that resulted in the tragic death of numerous innocent people

(including her maternal grandfather) and the kidnapping, torture, and eventual murder of James Cross who is a stark symbol of British authority.[12] The novel opens with Marie's exultation and feeling of triumph at her first successful terrorist act in a supposedly enemy zone in Montréal. Through Marie's vindictive act, Basilières dramatizes the absence or lack of humanity of such an action. The critical question remains, however: what is the symbolic significance of this scene in terms of colonialism, postcolonialism, and Québec nationalism? Could national ideologies blind Québec's radical nationalists to the bloodshed and terror involved in the liberation project?

> Torn metal, shattered plate glass windows, people screaming and bleeding their way across the floor, across the sidewalk. The fire, the noise, the ambulances, and lastly the reporters with no sense of the humanity of it. It was a symphony of lights. First the explosion itself, a great orange fireball, then the blinking flashers of police cars and ambulances; finally the flashbulbs and floodlights of photographers and video cameras. 19

Still, and notwithstanding the aftermath of her first, atrocious crime upon her own family (particularly her mother), Marie seems determined to devote herself to, and continue ahead, with her political struggle, mostly because her ultimate goal is Québec's sovereignty - a "Quebec ruled by the Québécois" (240). Yet, though she had no pangs of remorse regarding the tragic death of her grandfather, she ends up regretting her mother's long-lasting grief and catatonic state. Marie, however, equates her mother's undue slumber and silence throughout the course of the narrative with the silence and stasis of

[12] It is important to note that Pierre Laporte was the victim of these tragic events, not James Cross. He was also shot dead and not tortured. His corpse was found in a car trunk; it was not buried by his kidnappers as Basilières' narrative reveals.

Québécois society; she even justifies her terrorist attacks via her attempts to arouse and awaken the Québécois subjects in order to face and denounce their colonial, hard-to-accept realities. Marie conceives of her terrorism a crucial means of effective change:

> she identified Mother's way of handling her grief with the silence of the Québécois. In the same way that Mother was sleeping through a life otherwise unbearable, the great mass of her fellow Québécois slept through their political and economic suppression. If only they would awaken, how changed things could be. If Marie had transgressed by her actions, by causing Mother's pain, she would redeem herself by what was to come, by redeeming all her brethren, by awakening everyone to the horror of reality in Quebec, by showing how far they must go, by leading them away from a life made bearable only by intoxication and slumber. 240

Despite her apparent withdrawal and disinterest in her family's hardships, Marie undergoes a radical change in terms of her relationship with her own family. Indeed, she no longer appears to be indifferent or passive towards what her whole family is going through. After the death of her lover and leader of the *FLQ* (Hubert), she decides to go back home to take care of her mother. Perhaps, most importantly, she displays a keen interest in completing the unfinished projects of construction and renovation within the house with determination, albeit her ardor and fervor for her cause remain intact. Father realizes how changed and how involved in the family Marie has become. It is important, however, to note that her Father, too, shows a conspicuous involvement in his family's matters, more precisely his support and care of Mother after her strange illness as well as his support and help of Marie when she decides to abort Hubert's foetus. This new spirit of solidarity and concern emerge at the level of the community, too. The neighbours often

show up at the Desouches' house to visit Mother and spend some time with her. In short, these key transformations precipitate the emergence of a modern society and a new generation that values the vital role of these two components in the building and development of the nation. The text thus foregrounds the enthusiasm of the new generation to head forward in order to embrace change. It depicts a society that is eager to overcome its historical stasis - a society on its way to becoming:

> His own daughter back - and involved in the family. She'd never cared before, not like this: having an opinion, offering advice, even lifting tools to help - so much more help than his brother or father had ever been. Or his son. She was growing up. Not just that, but having her help in his project to launch a new career, to better the situation for all of them: it was a boon, a refreshing, a refreshing breeze that lifted his spirits and set his ambitions afire. 233

While helping in completing the unfinished projects within her home, Marie has seized the opportunity to build a separate room for her in the basement away from the eyes of the rest of the family. After slight hesitations and prior to executing her second criminal act, Marie reassures herself that revolutionary means are the only way to make her voice, and by implication, the voice of all Quebecers heard: "Here remained only one direction in which to move. The shore she had left behind had disappeared over the horizon - there was no harbour on any side - and all that was left was to press on and trust that somewhere ahead lay a new landing" (243). With the help of her felquiste friends, Marie breaks into James Cross's house to kidnap the British diplomat and lead him to the basement where she will, after days of degrading, humiliating, and debasing him, strangle him to death. Notably, James Cross represents the supreme power who (during carnival rituals) is

debased, suspended from his hierarchical rank, and above all, impelled to experience the mundane life of the poor and the dispossessed. In this typically hierarchical inversion, Cross was deprived of the luxuries and comforts of the bourgeois class. In Marie's tiny and cramped room, he is forced to endure the perennial conditions of the lower class and their day-to-day struggle with poverty; that is, he senses what it means to live a life of extreme deprivation:

> It was probably time to empty that bucket again. When she opened the door, there he was, praying. He disgusted her. The smell from his pail was strong and he hadn't had a bath in days, and his hair was stringy greasy, unkempt. His clothes were limp and wrinkled from prolonged use. His face was dark with stubble. He didn't even look up at her, continued his whispered mumblings into his hands as if it were she, not God, who was absent. Basilières 261

What enrages Marie most regarding Cross is his religion. She explicitly displays her acute abhorrence and caustic derision of a religion that was strategically used to serve political ends or purposes. Marie dramatically mocks his futile, endless prayers and supplications that failed to save him from the physical trial or inevitable death. For Marie, religion, as an ideological state apparatus, played a substantial role in perpetuating the status-quo in the province: "Even the French Catholic priests, black-frocked vultures, pederasts, preaching the revenge of the cradle as if it were for our own good, as if it meant something liberating for us. When for so many it was a trap, a stifling inescapable slavery" (262). Marie's choice of ending Cross's life with a crucifix might, then, suggest her derision and defiance of the religion that worked hand-in-hand with the colonizers to further trap and occlude the Québécois struggle for liberation and freedom. In *Social*

Realism in the French-Canadian Novel (1977), Ben-Zion Shek underlines the strategic role of the Catholic Church in supporting the economic and political elites against the goals and aspirations of the working class, which culminates in passing on a message of endurance and patience against all the abuses, as well as the static, intolerable colonial conditions. It deems poverty, as Guy Rocher argues, a "grace of God" and social demands for reform as "human interference with the grand design of God" (qtd. in Shek 25). Marcel Rioux adds that "[s]i les Québécois ne sont pas libres ni riches, c'est que la liberté est surtout d'ordre spirituel et que la vraie richesse est, plus que materielle, surtout morale et religieuse. La récompense des justes n'est pas de ce monde; c'est après la mort que les récompenses seront distribuées" (42). The Catholic Church (especially in the 1960s) witnessed an unprecedented and sharp drop in church attendance as well as a significant decline in its influential role as a "mighty pillar" of traditional Québec society (Shek 40).

In response to the Church's vital role in suppressing and stifling the desire of the Québécois to create a free, sovereign state in Québec, Marie deploys the crucifix, the principle and divine symbol of Christianity, to end Cross's life. This brutal act could be interpreted as a symbol of violent decolonisation:

> 'Where's God now, Mr. Cross? Has he forsaken you at last?' The crucifix dug into her flesh as he struggled desperately. She was afraid he'd break free as he held her right hand over her left, using the strength of both fists to contain the cross. He was making harsh, dry barking noises and his face was so red and full it seemed it might burst. He convulsed, and the points of the cross bit into Marie's hand. 263-64

Marie's act of transgression and defiance towards the Canadian government (manifested through kidnapping one of the key figures of its authority) is met with the

invocation of the War Measures Act, which anticipated Canada's military invasion of Québec. One could sense Basilières' trenchant critique of Canada's military intervention in 1970 Montréal. Basilières, in fact, seems to question whether one could equate the federal government's military invasion of Québec with the values of democratic political systems. Could the so-called "democratic state" trespass the basic values of democracy, particularly the protection of human rights, under the guise of ensuring order and protecting civilians upon its soil?

> Marie was aghast. Through the window she could see the lights of a convoy of military vehicles passing on Park Avenue, right in front of her house. In the sky she saw the slow dance of enormous helicopters descending over downtown squares, and still, atop the mountain, the cross glowing in the early evening twilight.
>
> So there it was: the Canadian government showing its true colours. Democracy? At the end of a gun barrel. They voted in the Soviet Union too. And also had these massive military parades. 259

Jean-Baptiste is subjected to physical violence, too, immediately after his incarceration, and so were all the prisoners who were randomly arrested as discussed in relation to Brault's film. Likewise, Basilières, in this particular passage, unveils the hidden life that lies within the closed doors of prisons and he seems severely critical of the injustices, the cruel punishments, and the humiliations the prisoners undergo at the hands of the police and investigators. What is striking, though, is the fact that those prisoners might be innocent like Jean-Baptiste himself who is not a member of the *FLQ*. In his most derisive tone, and through Jean-Baptiste's voice, Basilières writes:

> The cop began to strike him, first across the shoulder blades and then up and down his backside. Jean-Baptiste's knees buckled when he was hit on his calves, but he caught himself before he fell. He stood quivering under the blows and made sense of the pain by thinking how Grandfather had been right, that he was beginning to learn the way of the world and the hard lessons it offered. Right now he was learning how easy it was to be punished for someone else's actions, and how little Justice cared who suffered its retribution, as long as someone suffered indeed. 255

The theme of violence resurfaces throughout Basilières' narrative, but violence against the human body in particular becomes quite prominent. It is important then to note how Grandfather reacted when he first saw the strange, appalling body of Hubert and how he madly rushed towards him to put an end to his life: "Without hesitation, [he] lifted the shovel and swung it like a baseball bat. He broke Hubert's nose. Hubert swayed backward and grunted. He lost his balance and toppled over" (299). This emphasis upon the body - the inert body of the mother, "the body under duress, the injured body, the walking cadaver or zombie - each show[sic] moments of rupture in the discourses and political engagements of the individual and collective bodies of the nation" (Beneventi 10).

In *Purity and Danger* (1966), Mary Douglas, through her detailed examination of primitive cultures, contends that all that is not pure constitutes a locus or site of danger and power, hence a prominent threat to social order and social stability. The human body itself, Douglas argues, is shaped by rituals and/or discourses that seek to demarcate and found the limits of that body: "[I]deas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above

and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created" (15). Douglas's analysis suggests that social taboos help maintain the boundaries of the body and inculcate in social subjects "beliefs in the danger of crossing forbidden boundaries" (33). Such crossing of boundaries is seen as a "dangerous pollution" (165). The transgressor or the "polluter," therefore, becomes a "doubly wicked object of reprobation, first because he crossed the line and second because he endangered others" (165). Douglas's critical insights resonate with Marie as a key transgressor figure in Basilières' text, since through her transgressive terrorist ventures she not only crosses the social limitations imposed upon her body, but also puts in peril the bodies of others.

Perverse Sexuality and Bodily Control

Lauzon's explicit sexual imagery underscores the perverse/carnivalesque sexuality of his characters that by far reflects the socio-political unrest within the colonized nation. Léo's sexual drives strikingly deviate from the norms; they are queer, perverse, dysfunctional, and grotesque, and so are the exotic sexual drives of his grandfather with Bianca (the prostitute figure who exposes her beautiful body for money), and Ti-cul Godin with the cat or with his coach of hockey. In fact, grotesque sexuality invokes, among other things, defiance; it is indeed a potent mechanism of resistance that challenges the prevailing discourses of sex and/or sexuality of mainstream society. By highlighting sexual perversion or grotesque sexual images within his film, Lauzon tends to value and give voice to these non-normative sexual orientations that are set outside of normative/dominant cultural ideologies and are, above all, seen as queer, abnormal, or typically weird. All forbidden or taboo sexual drives that deviate from the norms or the

already established values and codes of civil society are hence embraced and placed at the center to affirm a sexual identity that counters and defies all limits.

As mentioned earlier, during a significant English class sequence, Léo, unlike his classmates, is intrigued by the omission of John and Mary's genital parts: "Il manquait des détails au corps de John et Tintin." He just could not assimilate why those details, or to be more precise, why the genital parts were hidden from "le tableau des organes de John." Léo is the only student who seems concerned about the silence imposed upon them around the issue of sex. He apparently refuses to take part in the blind chorus repetition that excludes those organs as though they are not part of the human body. Through emphasizing those bodily lower parts (e.g., the genitals, belly, breasts, and buttocks) that are radically ignored, degraded, and debased, Léo attempts to blur the binary divisions between the body's lower/upper parts. As Stallybrass and White explain:

> Grotesque realism images the human body as multiple, bulging, over-or under-sized, protuberant and incomplete. The openings and orifices of this carnival body are emphasized, not its closure and finish. It is an image of impure corporeal bulk with its orifices (mouth, flared nostrils, anus) yawning wide and its lower regions (belly, legs, feet, buttocks and genitals given priority over its upper regions (head, 'spirit,' reason). 9

In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Michael Bakhtin argues that such a celebration of the body could be read as a subtle critique of Christian ascetic discourse that views the body as "licentious, crude, dirty and self-destructive" (171), and thus constructs a hierarchical opposition between, as Katharine Young notes, "the spiritual, aristocratic, or ethereal central discourse and the bodily, vulgar, or grotesque peripheral one" (112). This hierarchy is reflected on the body itself: the face and head oppose what Bakhtin referred

to as the "material lower bodily stratum" (368). Equally, at home, no one could help or inform Léo about "cette queue qui gonflait entre [ses] jambes." As ideological state apparatuses, both the school and the family help inculcate a culture that represses children's sexuality. Sex is regarded as taboo and children's bodies are placed under an excessive control to preserve their innocence and purity (Foucault). No wonder that children's sexuality is not discussed but, instead, children's bodies (e.g., Léo's body, the bodies of his brother and sisters, and Ti-cul Godin's body) are put under a strict parental control and surveillance. Cultural values, according to Judith Butler, appear due to an "inscription" on the body that begins at an early stage (373). These inscriptions, as is shown in *Léolo*, begin within the borders of home and are enacted by parents themselves. With a sense of acute bitterness and derision, the voice-over narrative relates to what degree parents' excessive control negatively effect their children's behaviour conduct and might even be the cause of such perversions and transgressions:

> Cette nuit, Ti-cul Godin va rentrer tard, sa mère va lui examiner les doigts. Elle s'inquiète vraiment à savoir si Guy fume en cachette. Non Mme Chapleau! Votre fils s'enfile tout ce qui bouge, il a la pissette dévorée par des bactéries. Il avale toutes les pilules qu'il trouve pour vous oublier. Le dimanche, quand vous l'obligez à prendre son bain pour se render à l'église, il en profite pour se prostituer avec son coach de hockey: la viande blanche se vend mieux. Mais surtout, ne vous inquiétez pas. Il ne fume pas! Il s'étouffe à tous coups! Lauzon 1:31:08-46

In this regard, the rigid control exercised by Léo's father, as well as his excessive concern with maintaining boundaries, are the main sources of his children's angst and tension. The excessive control of bowel movements within Léo's home and boundary control

between the members of the family, for instance, speak of a tendency to maintain the boundary between the inner/pure self and the outer/ defiled one which is expressed through an aversion to bodily residues that is seen as a threat or danger to identity. Kristeva distinguishes between excremental and menstrual threats - the first lies at the outer surface of the body while the other lies within:

> Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death. Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference.71

The film portrays Léo's desire to embrace and indulge in all the sexual taboos. He first explores his sexuality with a piece of liver using a porn magazine. He also ventures into an intergenerational love affair with Bianca who is too old for him. Meanwhile, he seems to take great advantage in sharing the same bed with Fernand. He ultimately could not repress his sexual fantasies towards Rita when he saw her inert naked body: "C'est la seule fois que j'ai osé caresser ma sœur. Et à cet instant, je ne pouvais m'empêcher de passer à autre chose qu'une très belle séquence de film. Et comme toujours, je me regardais jouer à la vie." He also resorts to voyeurism to satisfy his repressed sexual desire for Bianca through looking at her naked breasts and body that are offered to satisfy the grotesque sexual demands of his grandfather. Léo's typical universe of sexual grotesqueries seems infinite: it has no limits or boundaries, nor is it governed by laws or regulations that limit the human body. This quite affirms Bakhtin's concept of the

grotesque body that is far from being a "closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (26). Like Léo, Ti-cul Godin does not conform to the established sexual norms; instead, he displays an interest in bestiality and same-sex acts, mainly with his hockey coach who is much older than him. Age, through these transgressive performances, has no value. This, in fact, could be read as a subtle critique to the cultural/social values that limit sex or love between partners with a fixed age. In short, children's sexuality in *Léolo* highlights the emergence of queer sexual drives that counter and transgress the national rhetoric of heterosexual normativity, purity, and innocence as a vehicle to control and regulate children's bodies through what Foucault referred to as bio-power or a bio-politics of the population. Schools and universities as well as a variety of other institutions emerged to fulfill these goals. As Foucault explains:

> there was a rapid development of various disciplines-universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops; there was also the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'bio-power.' 140

Léo's sexual perversion mirrors a dislocated national/cultural self and/or identity, precisely his psychological inner tensions, anxieties, and lack of stability or security in a stifling space that denies him the possibility of a way out. In *Weird Sex & Snowshoes: And Other Canadian Film Phenomena* (2001), Katherine Monk argues that perverse sexual manifestations in Canadian films express "our fractured and continuously frustrated national psyche" that is steeped in a history of sexual repression (129). Sex,

Monk further argues, has for long been an issue that is seldom discussed openly or without restraints: "We're repressed on both sides of the linguistic border. The French-Canadian soul is haunted by the Gothic complications of sex and the Catholic church, while the English-Canadian soul is burdened by Victorian codes of physical denial" (122).

Unlike Lauzon's challenging explicit sexual imagery, sex is simply alluded to in Basilières' text to dramatize the repression imposed upon the character's sexuality. Jean-Baptiste equates sex between his parents with "conjugal rights"- something that becomes sort of an obligation (16). Sex is not something desired by his parents; rather, it is escaped, mostly because of the internalized feelings of shame over an issue that is kept in the dark and hence remained obscure and mysterious (Foucault). Jean-Baptiste displays how both parents avoid marital sex. Both could not leave behind an overwhelming sense of shame and embarrassment that come to the fore at the outset of sexual intercourse. And yet, once those negative sensations are overcome, they do not seem involved. Unconsciously, they flee that sexual moment to focus upon the day-to-day problems as if to say that their sexual act does not have any meaning or they could hardly derive any satisfaction due to an overdue silence and repression to which they were exposed:

> when they did make love - once their initial reluctance and embarrassment was behind them, once they had resigned themselves to the effort-they found themselves contemplating the selves of their youth…. Both remembered and re-experienced the wordless pleasure of each other's warmth, the languid expression in the other's eyes, … the unpaid bills on the coffe table downstairs, the whole rest of the world around them. But this brief, infrequent transcendence could neither be lengthened nor multiplied and was for them not the precious gift of a sanctified marriage,

> but the cruel temptation of a mischievous creator, or the restrictive proscription of an oppressive society. Basilières 16-7

Grandfather and Aline's sexual relationship seems to be governed by the same rules. After realizing her husband's illegal/criminal job, Aline escapes from the shared bedroom. If she feels relieved by his absence at night, she seeks to escape him all day long while he is asleep either through her work in the kitchen or through doing the shopping. She "dreaded returning to Grandfather's bedroom every night, even if he wasn't there. … his presence was always impressed upon it like a weight on her soul" (35). She leaves the room once and for all and finds herself a safer place in Marie's deserted room. Yet, Grandfather does not seem troubled about whether she stays or leaves his bedroom as he indulges in a free sexual life outside the bonds of marriage. Aline's relentless escape from her husband implies an escape from sex with a man that deceived her. The uneasiness that is felt and experienced through these marriages might explain the "uneasy marriage between English and French communities" (Beneventi 9).

Sexual perversion, especially incest, never occurs between Basilières' characters, but is referred to as something that is strongly desired. Aline, for instance, feels anxious when she realizes that her body is placed under the scrutiny of Uncle and Father's eyes, which somewhat shocks her as she considers herself as a step-mother or a relative. Jean-Baptiste, in turn, escapes Aline who follows him wherever he goes to the extent that he no longer feels able to live in the same house:

> It wasn't the arguing and yelling of the family, the small tricks and cruelties they played upon one another, the disrespect they showed for his work; it wasn't even the impossibly run-down physical condition of the house that made living there unbearable for him. More than anything else, it was the

> quiet way in which Aline meekly tracked him from room to room, from dinner table to living-room couch to bathroom. Basilières 14-5

More significantly, though, Jean-Baptiste finds himself in a strange sexual situation when Marie suddenly gets into his bed when she hears that the police knocking at the door as she thinks that they were looking for her. Without hesitation and careless of what her family might think of her, she struggles to remove her clothes under her brother's blankets. Jean-Baptiste "got back into bed. His sister was cold beside him" (24). In all, though most of these sexual perversions took place in the characters' imagination, they nevertheless reveal how these characters are psychologically disturbed and that "[s]omething is broken in the symbolic bedroom of the nation: we can't seem to come together" (Monk144).

CHAPTER THREE

The Question of Cultural and Linguistic Hybridity

In *Léolo*, as in *Black Bird*, the question of cultural and linguistic hybridity engenders striking identity crises for the characters. Léo, for example, from the first scenes of the film, takes on a different name and identity to unveil his cultural and/or national identity crisis and, by extension, the crisis of his fellow citizens, who still feel colonized by English Canada. The exceptionally rebellious and non-conforming young protagonist thus lays bare his feelings of exclusion and alienation through both his name and hybrid French/Canadian identity: "Tout le monde croit que je suis un Canadien français. Parce que moi je rêve. Moi je ne le suis pas." Surprisingly enough, Léo not only rejects his imposed francophone name and identity, but he also rejects his real father: "On dit de lui qu'il est mon père. Mais moi je sais que je ne suis pas son fils." He, accordingly, imagines that his mother was accidentally impregnated by falling upon imported tomatoes loaded with the semen of a Sicilian peasant. Since then, he considers himself Italian and insists upon being called by his new, fictive name (Léolo Lozone). Yet, why Italian? Why does Léo deny his Québécois origins and crave to escape his ethnicity? Léo, in some sense, desires to step away from "la dialecique canadienne-française qui demeure, encore aujourd'hui épuisante, déprimante, infériorisante pour le Canadien français" (Aquin 323). His choice of Italy articulates an eagerness to evade "une situation intenable de subordination, de mépris de soi et des siens, d'amertume, de fatigue ininterrompue et de désir réaffirmé de ne plus rien entreprendre" (Aquin 323). His voyages and recurrent tendencies of escape to Italy, in effect, speak of his desire to get rid of this sense of powerlessness and shame of an ethnicity that has been colonized; he thus seeks to empower himself by creating and adopting a new identity that affirms his belonging to an

elsewhere. In *Cinéma de l'imaginaire québécois* (1990), Heinz Weinmann considers such a choice an act of decolonization:

> dans les pays colonisés non encore souverains, cette instance « matripatriotique » ne se trouve pas au cœur de cette collectivité, mais ailleurs, au sein d'une mère patrie souvent très éloignée, autant spatialement qu'affectivement. De ce fait, le rapport entre la colonie et la métropole sera celui d'une dépendance psycho-affective, économique, politique, claquée sur celle de la relation symbiotique qu'a l'enfant avec ses parents. La plupart des nations lors de la décolonisation, ont coupé ce lien symbiotique avec la mère patrie, considérée dorénavant comme entrave plutôt que cordon ombilical nourricier. 19

Anna Giaufret-Harvey, however, in "Le Québec entre Colomb et Capone: du mythe de la foundation à l'épopée ducharmienne" (2003) suggests that both Italy and Rejean Ducharme's *L'Avalée des avalés* (1966) have "la même fonction diégétique fécondatrice: ils font naître le protagonist" (136). Whilst the first, Nardout-Lafarge argues, has given birth to Léolo Lozone, the second brought forth the act of writing itself.

In *Quebec National Cinema* (2001), Bill Marshall elucidates the role of national cinema in reflecting the image of the imagined community or nation. Marshall (like other film scholars), notes the predominance of father-son relationships in recent films as well as the allusion to national allegory through the films' plots or characters. He also suggests the coexistence of two major trends or positions: a national position "read in unified, masculine, heterosexual, and Oedipal terms and one that is more heterogeneous, challenging that dominant masculine position, qualifying it by seeking to articulate with it other key terms such as class or jettisoning unity and the national-Oedipal scenario

altogether."(109). Marshall also attributes the prevalent "crisis" in masculinity to the failure of the Québécois male figure "to attain phallo-national maturity" (106). In this sense, this tense father/son relationship or, more precisely, Léo's rejection of the father figure from the onset is essentially steeped in the unresolved tensions of Québec's colonial history. As Weinmann argues, the intergenerational conflict between father and son in national films articulates Québec's complex and ambiguous colonial history, mainly characterized by Québec's inability to sever its bonds or ties with its series of successive colonizers:

> le Québec n'a jamais coupé réellement, c'est-à-dire radicalement, ses liens psycho-affectifs avec les différentes instances dont il dépendait politiquement au cours de son histoire (France, Angleterre, Église, le Fédéral). Il n'a fait que les transférer successivement d'une instance à l'autre. … Plutôt que de trancher carrément ses liens avec le Canada, il a préféré de les distendre. 19

Actually, since the British conquest of Québec in 1759, more particularly since New France was abandoned by its mother country, filmmakers resort to the broader tradition of the *roman familial* to fully articulate its frustration for being let down by France: "Le Canada français, grâce à ce recours au « roman familial », dénie son abandon par la mère française en s'imaginant qu'il est un enfant trouvé ou adopté par les parents français de basse extraction et que ses « vrais parents », de souche royale, le remettront à son rang d'enfant royal " (Weinmann 19). This troubled father/son relationship, then, reflects the agonies or the psychological effects of a collective imagination in the stages of what is termed "orphan cinema."

In this sense, Léo's rejection of his origins could be read as a rejection of the mother country (France) that had abandoned its children to the mercy of an "alien" mother. In Lauzon's film, Léo's mother incarnates this image of the estranged mother as she keeps herself at a distance from her children; she is authoritative, strong, devoted, controlling, and ever-present, but she hardly exudes her love or simply listens to, or communicates with them in order to get much closer and better understand them. The mother, for instance, never calls Léo by his fictive name despite his firm insistence. She does so at the very end of the film when it was absolutely too late. She concomitantly tends not to sustain and stimulate the development of his artistic talents, especially his tremendous love for writing: "As-tu fini d'être toujours dans les nuages? Tu serais mieux de faire tes leçons au lieu de toujours écrire tes histoires." There are, however, moments during the course of the film where the mother does not shy from showing her great devotion and love to her children when they are in urgent need of it (she gives much attention to Rita when she is institutionalized and dares to beat grandfather to save Léo's life).

Rejean Ducharme's *L'Avalée des avalés* (1966) has significant importance within the film in the sense that it offers Léo a sense of empowerment and resistance. It is a canonical novel left on purpose by the Word Tamer to save Léo from the hereditary illness that has devastated almost all of his family. For this reason, Léo regards him as his saviour: "Il m'a fallu longtemps pour comprendre qu'il était la réincarnation de Don Quichotte[13] et qu'il avait décidé de se battre contre l'ilotisme et de me protéger du gouffre de ma famille." More specifically, *L'Avalée des avalés* is an inter-text within *Léolo*; it is not only

[13] *Don Quichotte* (*Don Quixote*) is a novel written in 1605 by the Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes. It is a comic satire that tells the adventures of an elderly noble who loses his mind due to excessive readings of chivalric romances. He sets out on his old horse to revive and mock the era of knighthood and chivalry.

a source of inspiration, but also a valuable mode of escapism from Léo's bleak and shocking reality. The novel implies, among other things, a strong continuity between past and present in terms of resisting hegemonic order. Ducharme's protagonist (Bérénice Einberg) and Léo in fact share a common goal: they both struggle for social, political, and economic power; they both value the power of words in resisting cultural hegemony. Yet, each of them expresses that goal differently. Whilst Bérénice exudes her wrath against familial authority and societal norms with outrageous violence, Léo acts in a latent and subtle manner. More broadly, the novel has another significant role, mainly it is Léo's guide in his lone journey of self-discovery. Léo himself acknowledges the importance of this book in his life: "Je ne cherche pas à me souvenir de ce qui se passe dans un livre. Tout ce que je demande à un livre, c'est de m'inspirer ainsi de l'énergie et du courage, de me dire ainsi qu'il y a plus de vie que je peux en prendre, de me rappeler ainsi l'urgence d'agir."

Another arresting similarity between these two young protagonists lies in their strong desire and love for solitude, a substantial fuel for self-expression and artistic creativity. Léo reads directly from *L'Avalée des avalés* :

> Je trouve mes seules vraies joies dans la solitude. Ma solitude est mon palais. C'est là que j'ai ma chaise, ma table, mon lit, mon vent et mon soleil. Quand je suis assise ailleurs que dans ma solitude, je suis assise en exil, je suis assise en pays trompeur. Je suis fière de mon palais. J'ai à cœur de le garder chaud, doux et resplendissant, comme pour y recevoir des papillons et des oiseaux. Si j'avais plus d'orgueil, j'anéantirais par des meurtres ceux qui compromettent le bien-être de ma solitude, ceux qui font gronder de la

> haine dans sa cheminée, ceux qui tendent de la tristesse à ses fenêtres. Ducharme 20

Léo's mother unfairly ignores his artistic skills; she insists upon directing his attention towards his school achievements instead. Nonetheless, Léo's incommensurable love and admiration for his mother and her ability to silently endure the pains and sufferings of her own family remain intact: "Ma mère avait la force d'un grand bateau qui voguait sur un océan malade." This somewhat paradoxical quality that the mother/nation incarnates pertains to its dual, symbolic role. As Edgar Morin claims in "Pour une théorie de la nation"(1984): "La nation est, en effet, bisexuée: elle est maternelle-féminine en tant que mère patrie que ses fils doivent chérir et protéger. Elle est paternelle-virile en tant qu'autorité toujours justifiée, impérative, qui appelle aux armes et aux devoirs" (131).

The French-Canadians' idealized image vis-à-vis the adoptive parents (the King and Queen of England) suddenly waned due to the brutal repression of the Patriots' War (1837-38) and refusal to accept their demands of constructing a free, democratic nation in Québec. Once more, they rejected their adoptive parents as they once rejected their symbolic biological ones and thought that their "real" parents were not here, but at some remote place. As Weinmann explains:

> depuis 1820, l'image des « bons parents » anglais ne cesse de se dégrader, puisqu'ils résistent obstinément aux demandes d'une représentation plus démocratique des canadiens français, jusqu'à la prise d'armes, à la Révolte des Patriotes de 1837-38, que l'Anglais réprime avec une rare brutalité: …. Du coup, les parents anglais suivent les français dans la voie du rejet et de l'estrangement. Ils sont devenus aussi des étrangers, de simples parents adoptifs. Les «vrais» parents se trouve ailleurs. 20

The intricate problematic of national/cultural identity in Québec is thus enmeshed in its unresolved colonial history. The theme of "troubling parentage" is raised in *Black Bird* with the same vehemence and intensity. Throughout the course of the narrative, Marie is troubled by her parents' mixed marriage, for she casts it as the main stumbling block to Québec's sovereignty. "[I]t was her parents' fault why did they have to mix up their marriage like that, the way Canada tried to impose a union between French and English? She hated the English" (259-60). More particularly, Marie hates that Anglo side that runs inside her veins from which she cannot extricate herself. Yet, Marie's sense of hatred towards her family, and by implication her own Québécois society, emanates from her deep sense of disempowerment; of belonging to a family/nation that is subordinated and dispossessed. What she particularly hates about her family is its inferior status, its dependence, its extreme poverty, and above all, the queer jobs of Grandfather and Uncle. In short, she hates to belong to a family of "body snatchers," a family that opts for criminality for survival (260). By and large, her denial and rejection of her family is premised upon economic and socio-political grounds and articulates her desire for real change. For instance, she has a tense relationship with her brother, simply because he has chosen a different political path. For her, he stands in for all that she hates about her enemy that lies at the other side of the border. Her brother's love of poetry and literature, or as Marie puts it, "words" sets them apart, for she values action as the only effective means to free her nation from the firm grip of its colonizers (20). But Marie's blind hatred of her brother goes beyond limits insofar as she dared to empty his attic boxes where he placed all his pamphlets of poetry to fill them with Hubert's manifestos, which will ultimately lead to his incarceration.

Like Marie, Léo's rejection of his dual identity is an act of decolonization as well as a claim to power in the sense that it expresses his strong desire to cut the ties once and for all with his own colonial past and series of colonial parents. In other words, Léo yearns for a sovereign, homogenous nation-state. The same political concerns are expressed by

Marie in *Black Bird*. Yet, as the texts in question reveal, both Marie and Léo are faced with complex problems that occlude their ultimate goals of sovereignty. On his part, Léo foregrounds the emergence of a diverse multicultural society, which implies that the Québécois dream of an imagined sovereign nation with clear-cut boundaries, culture, and language is futile - if not no longer within reach as Léo emphatically and pessimistically confirms in the final sequences of the film: "Je ne rêve plus. Je ne rêve plus."

Québec becomes the de facto home for diverse ethnic groups from different parts of the world (his next-door Italian neighbour, the Arabs, the Jews, to name but a few). Even the film's international soundtrack (Tibetan chants, The Rolling Stones, Tom Waits, Thomas Tallis, etc.) ironically contains not a single Québécois song, which might suggest the imminent threat to the survival of Québécois cultural heritage, language, and way of life. Sherry Simon illustrates the discrepancy between a simple and complex society in terms of identifying individual, social, and national identities. She asserts the difficulty of identifying the signs or limits of a single culture within a multicultural society:

> On se rend compte que la culture (dans l'ensemble de ces acceptions) a toujours eu comme fonction primordial de servir de signe de reconnaissance et donc de division. Elle fournissait les clés permettant de dessiner l'horizon des identités. Aujourd'hui, c'est la surabondance des images et des discours qui frappe. Les paysages surchargés de signes ne renvoient plus à des ensembles culturels identifiables. Comment définir les limites qui permettent la constitution d'identités individuelles, sociales, nationales? 19

The policy of cultural diversity undermines the long-lasting endeavours of the emergent nation to attain sovereignty. Multiculturalism, as Mookerjea et al. point out, can be

understood as the "overdetermined result of this search for an imaginary identity enabling the restitution of hegemony" (21). In her remarkable essay "The Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of 'Canada'"(2009), Himani Bannerji contends that the policy of cultural diversity is an act of appropriation that is meant to contain the Québécois struggle for liberation and independence, especially during the Quiet Revolution, a time of a growing consciousness of the need to establish a sovereign Québécois nation: "Its 'difference-studded unity,' its 'multicultural mosaic,' becomes an ideological sleight of hand pitted against Quebec's presumably greater cultural homogeneity"(327).

Léo is thus obsessed with finding a free space that he could call his, a real "chez nous" where he could feel at home. In this sense, the recurrent scenes of Léo running in the vast valleys of Italy (his idyllic dream land) as well as the underwater scenes express a longing for freedom, an aspiration to breathe free, and a strong desire to belong to a free nation-state. Ironically, Italy and more specifically, Sicily, was historically devastated by a series of colonial powers. Lauzon's ironic choice of Italy, then, evokes Québec's current entrapment in colonization. Tony Simons argues that "Sicile, un lieu qui possède une longue histoire de colonisation, ayant été dirigé par les Grecs, les Romains, les Chrétiens, les Arabes, les Normans, les Souabes, les Angevins, les espagnoles d'Aragon, les maitres de Savoie et les Habsbourg" is a symbol of a complex colonial space (119).

Léo's home does not offer salvation or a secure space for healthy growth and development. Neither does his neighbourhood, where Léo's brother Fernand is tormented by a local Anglophone. Léo's feelings of alienation and exclusion go beyond his home and locality to include his nation. In *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (1995), David Sibley examines the problem of otherness and exclusion in

Western societies in these three distinct sites: home, locality, and nation that simultaneously affect one another despite their apparent distinction. According to Sibley, both the locality and the nation penetrate the home and shape the families' behaviour. Léo's locality is one of fear, violence, and exclusion. It indeed imparts no sense of security or protection for both Léo and Fernand. Fernand was attacked twice by an Anglo bully while Léo observes with extreme rage, partly because Fernand represents a potential rival in the paper business the Anglo seeks to monopolize. Fernand's rival, however, insists through his exclusionary acts to claim openly that they are mere strangers, that neither Fernand nor Léo belong here: "Le papier, c'est ma business. Tu ne peux pas continuer à me faire la peine comme ça. Il faut que tu changes de ruelle. Ici c'est chez nous !" The struggle between Fernand and his supposed "enemy" denotes the historical tensions and conflicts that characterize the Anglophone/Francophone relationships either in Québec or Canada, shown here in spatialized forms of conflict. The source of this conflict, as shown in the film, is steeped in the control and direction of Québec's economy by outsiders (mainly English Canadians and Americans). Fernand's venture into the world of business might then symbolize the desire of Quebeckers to exert real control over the economy of their nation; it effectively signals the rise of a new consciousness - a newfound sense of self.

Feelings of Exclusion and Imprisonment within the Borders of Home

As a site of power and control, Léo's home emerges as an integral source of his sense of estrangement and imprisonment. Lauzon's camera lens insists upon displaying the interior of Léo's small and overcrowded home, which allows for an encounter with the key physical spaces where the protagonist spends most of his time. Of course, in

crowded dwellings such as Léo's, opportunities for privacy and agency are few and far between. Notably, Léo does not feel free to act inside "his home" as he wishes, mostly because his behavioural conduct and movements are controlled by the watchful eyes of his parents. His father discovers the secret place where Léo keeps his "bébittes" (bugs) and gets rid of them without delay. Léo moves inside the home with great precaution as though he lives in a space that is barely his or as though he is a thief dreading to be caught or attacked at any moment. Sometimes, he uses his flashlight and waits until his parents are sound asleep to sneak into Rita's room. The rigid control of the parents might explain his uneasiness and his constant search for a private space where he can act freely and simply be himself as it might also explain his recourse to the locality to escape the suffocating control of his parents. In short, Léo strives for freedom and a space of his own, so he resorts to the bathroom (the most marginal and abject space in the house) to break free of the excessive control of his parents.

This lack or absence of a private space of his own has a negative impact upon Léo's process of development and growth. Rachel Sebba and Arza Churchman explain that separated spaces can have a "stabilizing and regulating role at individual, group and community levels. Where no such fixed and clear boundaries exist, the territory may not serve this stabilizing function and may be, in fact, a source of conflict and tension" (qtd. in Sibley 97). One could argue that space has a dual function: though it plays a central role in developing a secure and stable sense of self, it nevertheless has a constraining function as it "determines the number of physical boundaries and interior spaces which can be regulated or defended" by the dominant figures in the house (97-8).

Léo's sister's isolated bedroom in the attic further emphasizes this overwhelming feeling of isolation, rejection, and exclusion. Some caged domestic animals are kept in the

attic, too. Their arresting presence in Léo's home reminds us of the theme of imprisonment as a recurring motif within the film not only at the level of the location, but also at the level of the locality and the nation. In parallel, the different physical boundaries within Léo's domestic sphere promote a sense of isolation and lack of communication that exist between its members. The film, for instance, does not portray a single sequence of a real parent/child communication or any effective communication between the other members who only get together at meal times. This lack of communication is particularly apparent between Fernand and his brother who share the same bedroom, but never confide or open up to each other. Unfortunately, the brothers behave as though they are mere strangers who have absolutely nothing in common. Most of the time, Fernand behaves like his father. More specifically, his peculiar relationship with Léo never goes beyond exchanging casual words. Such divisions and boundaries that enhance distance and separation rather than connections amongst the members of the family permeate the brothers' own bedroom; each has his own personal belongings in a separate section of the room, which, in turn, could be read as an articulation of their disparate orientations and interests. In Léo's hierarchical family, the father (the key figure of authority) assumes an authoritarian relationship with other members of the family, which, for Sibley, would be "more likely to generate anxieties because of its concern with strong boundary maintenance and exclusion" (96). The father, in particular, is silent all the time; he speaks only to give orders. Ostensibly, he excels at controlling the movements of his children within the home through a rigid space control. As mentioned previously, the father seems to control everything inside the home, even his children's bowel movements; in fact, his grotesque and exaggerated behaviour subtly adds to the characters' sense of detachment and alienation, since the home represents a milieu that should offer children much more

freedom of both movement and speech. According to Sibley, "[d]etachment signifies a lack of communication and isolation, a condition which may be associated with strong classification because strong boundaries will minimize interaction" (97). And yet, due to this rigid control and acute absence of dialogue, each of the children becomes totally absorbed in their own, alien universe. Léo, however, rejects and transgresses all the erected boundaries and imposed walls that separate him from the other members of his family, especially his sisters. He seems very concerned about his sisters' mental disorder; he listens to Nanette and cares for Rita (the guardian of his collection of horseflies) in order to alleviate their pains and agonies. Meanwhile, he visits them regularly at the hospital. Interestingly, however, the rigid control exercised by the father might be suggestive of the close link between the father's desire for control and Québec's colonized identity. His eerie silence, as well as the silence of the grandfather, speak of a failed masculine self that, by extension, reflects a failed collective identity/nation that still endures an overwhelming feeling of shame and embarrassment for not being able to lead the nation away from its colonized context.

The same atmosphere of imprisonment, alienation, and detachment permeats the Desouches' domestic space whose family members eschew the pivotal role of communication and dialogue in overcoming the existing barriers amongst its members. Basilières depicts a morose picture that subtly derides their actual isolation and sense of loneliness:

> Jean-Baptise was back in his room as usual; Uncle was probably, and thankfully, in his with his dog; Mother was dazedly staring out the living-room window, perhaps thinking of Angus, perhaps waiting for another visit from her friends; Father was in the basement, but he wasn't digging. Aline

> had never known real silence here; almost suddenly, she realized how empty the house felt: Marie, Grandfather and Grace were all gone. 68

Jean-Baptiste has the feeling that home is like a grave in the sense that each of the family members is isolated from one another; and are all enclosed in separated rooms that keep them apart and alienated even though they live under the same roof. The location of his room itself underscores this acute sense of solitude and distance, or perhaps a sense of lack of connectedness. He has chosen the room "on the top floor at the back end, the most remote and quiet in the house. Here, in what was almost an attic, he was insulated from the noise of the family and the street, free to read or compose his poems" (13). Like Léo, Jean-Baptiste escapes his obscure/abysmal world through reading and writing as important vehicles of survival.

Of course, the Desouches belong to the same family, but they hardly confide in or open up to each others. Jean-Baptiste, for example, does not fully know his twin sister with whom he should normally have many things in common. The twins rarely communicate or try to understand their different, paradoxical paths, choices, and world visions. Their casual communication springs up in the form of Marie's requests for help and support of her cause that Jean-Baptiste constantly rejects. This, in turn, creates relentless tensions and conflicts between them and, more particularly, adds to their sense of alienation and exclusion, given that Jean-Baptiste has chosen to identify with his Anglo heritage while Marie identifies with her French one.

This lack and absence of dialogue become much more visible, especially between Aline and her abusive husband who continues to ignore and mistreat her. It becomes clear by the end of the novel how much such ignorance and indifference weigh on her. When she meets with the resurrected Hubert, he immediately reawakens her repressed memories

of the barren, dull, and most restricted life with her ungrateful husband. She "burst into tears and lowered her head to the table, sobbing. It was just like having breakfast with her husband. He was unwashed, uninterested, ungrateful and uncommunicative" (295). As Aline speaks only French, the rift between her and the other members of the family widens. Her relationship with Mother remains limited and flimsy despite Jean-Baptiste's attempts to help them cross their language barrier, which could have been a real solace and comfort to both of them since they are caught within the same patriarchal authority of abusive husbands: "Aline and Grandfather, or Mother and Father, the scene was the same: the husband was angry and loud, the wife offered a moderate rebuke and then suffered an explosive retaliation that left her near tears and acquiescing in silence" (11-2). Their status as subordinated women does not seem enough to connect them as the issue of language that is at the heart of the socio-political tensions and conflicts between the two/alien communities continues to set them in their isolated borders of two solitudes. The linguistic gulf and silences between these female characters go beyond the borders of home to haunt its outer social space where they will remain mere strangers: "[T]he barrier of language kept them apart at home, just as it would have if they'd met on the street or in some shop"(11). As Sherry Simon puts it, these two communities "live in relations of proximate strangeness or intimate otherness" (xiii).

The patriarchs can meet only at times of crisis when they need to urgently act for their survival (such as their meeting to devise a way to get gas and electricity for free from their next-door neighbours). The women, mainly Mother and Aline, are definitely excluded from such meetings. These exclusionary acts relegate women to a secondary/lower position and simultaneously underline a gendered space that calls into question the critical status of women not only within society but within their domestic

sphere as well. Arguably, moments or occasions of a real gathering in the family are quite rare. However, when such situations occur, the family members seem unwilling to stop talking as if to compensate for long days of isolation and lack of communication: "On occasion Uncle sat with Father in the evenings, and over a table of empty beer bottles in the kitchen the two would trade stories back and forth, in English. It was practically the only time Uncle was talkative, as if he were releasing words that had been pent up in him until then"(12). Overall, such an atmosphere might be the root cause of the disorder, confusion, and identity crises of most of the characters just as it might also be a symbol of the "uneasy alliances, and troubled familial bonds of English and French communities" (Beneventi 2-3).

Ambivalent Identities in *Black Bird*: Marie versus Jean-Baptiste

Marie is dissatisfied with her mixed and/or hybrid identity; she typically deems her parents' marriage, and by extension marriages between Anglophones and Francophones, an ineluctable trap that further complicates the project of Québec's separatism as well as her concept of a monolithic identity. She closely connects such intermarriages with Canada's attempt to suppress and repress the Québécois endeavour to differentiation and distinction. She therefore rejects her hybrid identity and hates her Anglophone side - that very problematic part of her identity that she could never deny or renounce: "She hated being partly English. It meant she was tainted; it meant she must hate what she was herself. It was just like being part of her frustrating, hateful family. … She didn't relish listening to her friends when they railed against Anglos, because they all knew that somewhere deep inside her was something that hurt when prodded" (260). Still, her inclination and choice to identify with her Québécois/French identity subtly imply a

denial of her Anglophone identity, which, equally, speaks of her desire to suppress or erase the English part that is an integral part of her inner being - of who she is.

Most significantly, language, in Marie's view, is a window to identity. It is language that informs identity and defines who you are; yet, her definition of identity, as Basilières pinpoints, remains elusive and biased since she allows herself and her community what she denies to her linguistic Other. Basilières, in fact, seems unable to assimilate the paradox involved in such a definition:

> Anglophone and English were synonymous to [Marie and her felquiste friends]; they couldn't accept Anglophones as Canadians, even though they saw themselves as Québécois, distinct from the French of France. And if you had suggested to that in the eyes of the natives forced onto reserves, they were just as much occupying foreigners as their perceived enemies, they would certainly have angrily explained the difference to you. 44

Marie, at the same time, attributes the existing divisions between Anglophones and Francophones to "language, pure and simple" (45). For Marie and her *FLQ* friends, language is not just a way of communication; rather, it is a way of thinking, "a way of being, a way of life. If you take that away, you [will] destroy an entire culture. You can't have French people who do not speak French. If they speak English, they are Anglos" (137-38). This definition, no matter how tight and limited it might seem, targets preserving and protecting the Québécois language and culture from the threatening invasion of English. Hubert, too, shares Marie's fears and worries about the potential distinction of French due to forced anglicization. This imminent threat that surrounds French as the language of a minority group in North America alludes to the potential extinction and

disappearance of its people who are assimilated to the language and culture of mainstream society:

> It was a mistake to think anyone could enjoy a normal life while anglicization proceeded behind their backs, while they were asleep. Every day and every minute the Québécois were threatened with assimilation into the great unwashed English mob of North America. Already too many of them had intermarried, and bred children who could no longer speak French-right here in Montreal, there were French kids with French names who couldn't speak a word of it. Families broken up by this linguistic gulf. There were grandparents unable to talk to their own descendants. Basilières 136

The Desouches' family itself best exemplifies that threat since English becomes the language that these Francophone characters speak within their own home. This very name (Desouches) is ironically deployed to suggest to what extent it has lost its meaning of authenticity or originality. Marie further links the Anglophones in Québec with the British - an imperial "occupying power" that is advertently distanced in time and space and denied any room in Marie's current conception of identity (44). This emphasis upon language is concomitantly due to the fact that it is the medium through which a "hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and … conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality'" are installed and perpetuated (Aschcroft et al.7).

In this regard, Marie's identification as a Québécoise articulates, among other things, her dreams and aspirations to create a sovereign nation-state within Québec with its distinct language, culture, and clear-cut boundaries. Ostensibly, her bordering of identities projects her urgent desire to delineate the borders of the emergent nation, but

her nationalist discourse or rhetoric projects a latent desire to exclude their English-speaking Others (and perhaps all the other ethnic minorities) from a territory seen as belonging solely to the Québécois. Marie's exclusionary concept of identity imparts a sense of her patriotic fervour and reaffirms her desire for an ethnically pure identity that in parallel connotes an acute lack of tolerance or acceptance of difference. Even so, and despite Marie's recognition of the strategic role of language, she is ironically crippled by her linguistic limitations, most notably her inability to use language effectively to express that most cherished identity, something which her twin brother excels at. She "would let the others contact the media. She wasn't interested in words, unlike her brother. Words were so anemic compared to actions; words were the weapons of her enemies, the English politicians. What had she heard but empty words all her life?" (20).

As a terrorist, Marie undoubtedly values action over words; she believes that action could achieve what words could not. Actually, her belief in action rather than "language" differentiates her from Jean-Baptiste. Yet, could her series of violent actions be sufficient to articulate who she is? Presumably not. She could not even openly declare her responsibility for the blast. That probably explains why she insists to be present at the scene after the detonation of the bomb, which equally reveals Marie's tendency to legitimize and justify that her terrorist action is as valuable as any other artistic work. In other words, Marie conceives of herself as a heroine whose work should be added to the unforgettable memories of the Québécois:

> But she couldn't bring herself simply to set it and walk away. That was too impersonal, as if she were an anonymous quirk of fate rather than an active, intentional being. That would be like one of those unsigned statements her comrades … were always sending to the newspapers. … Her work was hers

> alone, and her insistence on watching it to completion was her way of signing her statements-for they were political statements-just as an artist would sign a canvas, or her brother sign his poems. Basilières 18-19

Though Marie does not shy away from taking action, she recognizes her own limits with "manifestos, letters and proclamations of any sort" to first distinguish herself from Jean-Baptiste who has facility with words and second to blame her failure in learning French on being "raised bilingual, and that made reading difficult for her to learn. She had initially been unable to distinguish between the languages, because although her parents spoke to her in either one or the other, she and her brother had spoken them both interchangebly" (70).

Unequivocally, Marie's bilingual status amplifies her confusion and brings forth unexpected entanglements. She is suspected by her cell friends due to her mixed ethnic and linguistic heritage, especially her Anglo side that partly situates her, whether she likes it or not, on the side of the enemy - the actual oppressor and colonizer of a territory seen as belonging to the Québécois. How could she then be trusted without reservation? Out of wrath, she wildly reacts to Hubert's skeptical and infuriating doubts regarding her veracity, authenticity, and devotion to her political cause: "Well, that deserved another blow; after which, 'I am Desouche,' cried Marie. 'I have proven myself in direct action, with dynamite. Have you? You're a scribbler, like Jean-Baptiste. You do nothing. And you doubt me?" (90).

The fact that Angus turns out to be one of her unexpected victims bewilders Marie and turns her life upside-down. This might be read as a punishment for her acts of transgression and for daring to challenge the government with her violent confrontations. She is hence forced to endure the aftermath of her socially illegitimate and unacceptable

act first within her domestic space, particularly through witnessing her mother's agonies, long lasting grief, and subsequent retreat into her silent world.

Ironically, Marie is baffled by her mother's negative view and violent outrage against the FLQ. She silently internalizes all her mother's ruthless remarks against her and the other members that she represents:

> Mother couldn't stifle a burst of abuse against 'those bastard felquiste swine,' meaning the FLQ; meaning, if the family'd only known, Marie. And then she dissolved again in her own tears. Marie, pale, accepted it silently. She was overwhelmed; her world had changed unexpectedly. It would take her weeks of sullen silence to digest it. It had never occurred to her that anyone she knew personally would be affected by her terrorist acts. Everything had always been aimed against an ill-defined 'them' and not an all-too-familiar 'us.' Basilières 27

Marie's terrorist act, which was intended to affect only her enemies, ends up affecting a member of her family and thus she is forced to endure the sufferings and pains of the families whose members were lost in her most revolutionary act. This somehow destabilizes Marie, who realizes the impossibility of severing or disentangling "us" from "them," since they become intricately mixed. Strangely enough, the Othered "them" emerges as part of the familiar "us." Hence, the once clear, established binaries are suddenly blurred, turned absurd, if not, become meaningless. Basilières thus might be suggesting that English and French Canada are but one family, which is made much clearer by Jean-Baptiste's line, extracted from Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: "Our lives may be separate but they run in the same direction, like parallel lines" (qtd. in Basilières 23). Perhaps, then, any act of violence between the two

communities could be read as an act of violence against a member of one's own family, since mixed-marriages have troubled the "purity" or homogeneity of both communities. *Léolo*, however, does not convey the same message since the protagonist's latent message insists upon Québec's liberation and independence that could be sensed from Léo's every gesture and every movement from the outset of the film to its very end.

Jean-Baptiste's play reiterates Basilières' political message of unity between English and French Canada; more precisely, it suggests that the Québécois attempt to erect borders between citizens of the same nation will first and foremost isolate families as the hero in act two clearly demonstrates, through his desire to cross the barricade to reach his dying mother. Unfortunately, he is banned from crossing the never-ending barriers that the Québécois continue to erect between what Basilières views as one nation:

> Styrofoam bricks were flying back and forth when the hero appeared, crawling, holding up a white cloth, waving it about as he approached the line of defence. The defenders ignored it, shooting wildly at him, pelting him with whatever came to hand. Since the props didn't harm him, he made it to the barricade and climbed over. Atop, he was met by a defender who held him back.
>
> 'You're not crossing this line, brother,' he declared in a thick French accent.
>
> 'But I must get through. My mother's dying!'
>
> 'Don't worry. No one dies in English here.' 192

In this regard, one could argue that Basilières considers the FLQ's grotesque and revolutionary gestures a "struggle for ideals," which could be as "corrupt, hollow and egotistical as any revolution - Russian, French, American" (197). Nevertheless, Marie and

the other cell members' rigid and inflexible conception of identity continues to haunt the whole narrative. More specifically, it re-occurs via their intolerance of the message her brother's play conveys. The "chorus of booing increased…the disaffected had won the field. Many were leaning forward into their disparagement, cupping their hands around their mouths like funnels for the noise: BOOOO!" (196). The same vulgar and grotesque practices re-emerge at his first poetry reading. Mrs. Pangloss, an Irish immigrant and neighbour of the family, depicts the crowd's lack of respect, indifference, and conspicuous disdain regarding Jean-Baptiste's so-called "futile" words:

> And the crowd certainly didn't behave in the manner she expected. None of them seemed to be listening at all to Jean-Baptiste's poetry. She wondered if he knew he was being largely ignored. Was he soldiering on bravely in the face of the excited table talk going on around him? How could he not realize he might as well be talking to himself? And as for the audience, why weren't they listening in respectful silence, …. She couldn't hear him at all. Basilières 205-06

Mrs. Pangloss does not quite understand why Jean-Baptiste is being unfairly mistreated and interrupted. The hostile reaction of the audience reveals a rejection of the divergent views of the Other as it might also be read as a denial of any moment of agency within Québec's borders; that is, public space should from now on belong to the Québécois subject. Mrs. Pangloss is equally baffled at the crowds' antagonistic attitude towards his personal choice to read his poetry in English. The crowd shamelessly and publicly asks him to read in French. These attitudes make her question whether such transgressions could be tolerated in a free, democratic nation that values human rights:

> It was a shame, however, that so many of these drunken French louts kept shouting about maudit anglais and calling for Jean-Baptiste to read in French. Who did they think they were? If people chose to speak English, that was their business, wasn't it? It was still a free country, wasn't it? And where was the waiter with her crème de menthe? Basilières 206

In short, Marie's limited vision based upon her nationalist definition of Québécois identity is strikingly challenged by Jean-Baptiste's new vision and interpretation that is informed by his role as a poet/writer, which will enable and help him escape the suffocating and exclusive environment of Québec.

Jean-Baptiste's Peripheral, In-between Identity

Unlike Marie's fixed or objective definition of identity, Jean-Baptiste offers up an alternative to conceptions of identity that takes into consideration the limitations and dangers involved in the either/or position adopted by Marie and her extremist cell members. For Jean-Baptiste, identity is fluid, open, flexible, and above all, inclusive of Otherness. He thus envisions his hybrid identity beyond spatial and linguistic borders, particularly in an in-between or liminal space - between English and French, between Anglophone and Québécois, between Québec and the rest of Canada, between colonizer and colonized, and between past and present. As illustrated by Homi k. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), these in-between spaces or junctures, which he terms as third space, "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1-2). He further argues that it is in "the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that

the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2). It is in this spectral line, in this neither/nor position that refuses and rejects confinement to one specific culture, language, or territory that Jean-Baptiste could articulate his cultural difference/alterity, his dual/hybrid identity as well as the difficulties or inconveniences of being raised bilingual and thus caught between two alien cultures and languages at the same time: "What a funny, awkward place to stand, between two languages, as if he had one foot on each rail of a train's track" (76). Yet, how does this link to the carnivalesque as a mode that rejects all limitations? Obviously, Jean-Baptiste's stance in an in-between position that rejects being confined to one specific place/nation coincides with the carnivalesque spirit that targets disrupting and suspending established barriers between people or places and fixed notions and beliefs that resist the process of becoming and metamorphosis.

What seems problematic, however, is how to affirm and assert his cultural and/or linguistic difference; that is, his pre-inscribed Otherness in a socio-political environment that is typically hostile to difference and/or alterity. As Bhabha asks:

> How are subjects formed 'in-between,' or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.?) How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual, and even incommensurable? 2

Jean-Baptiste situates himself in an in-between zone, referred to by Marie L. Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) as a contact zone, to invite

interracial, intercultural, and interlinguistic communication not only between races, but between languages and cultures, too. Pratt's contact zone, however, is characterized by contacts and interactions between subjects of unequal or asymmetrical powers (e.g., contacts between colonized and colonizers or between slaves and masters). As such, these zones are not free of tension, conflicts, and attempts at coercion. As Pratt states:

> 'contact zone' is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whole trajectories now intersect. … A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness of apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. 6-7

The contact zone, according to Pratt, offers the possibility of dialogue across difference despite unequal power relations based on shared aspirations and mutual goals.

Ironically, Jean-Baptiste (a dual subject) does not master his father's mother tongue (French). He therefore can only read his favourite French authors (such as Voltaire, Camus, and Flaubert) in English translation. Translation becomes his only medium to mediate and break the unbridgeable chasm between these two languages, cultures, and ways of thoughts and life. What he admires most about these French authors is their ability to transport him into new, promising venues away from the linguistic and cultural borders imposed by "[b]oth solitudes" (76). That is to say, the authors' works enable him to transcend the limitations, marginalizations, and polarizing of identities on the basis of language or culture as typically the case in Québec. By doing so, he disrupts the

established racial, linguistic, and territorial borders since his strategic stance allows him to vacillate between both languages and cultures, between Québec and the rest of Canada without confining himself to either of them.

Through reading French books, Jean-Baptiste pinpoints the possibility of a new, hybrid reality that embraces the shattering realities of the on-going, irreconcilable political conflicts over linguistic, territorial, and cultural divides. He is amazed at the ability of words and their power to transcend the polarities that underpin a radical separation between either of the two languages (French and English) or the two communities:

> he was so relaxed in the act of reading that he lost track of the words themselves. He didn't see the printed pages but saw right into the action of the text, not as if looking at images or as if dreaming, but as if the pages were fields of space in which another kind of existence held sway; … and one subject only to the powers of the words themselves. Adjectives tumbled into one another, displacing sedentary nouns, modifiers soothed and slackened the sharp verbs; metaphors, invisibly bridged the gap between pages; phrases and tropes ran circles around subjects. Basilières 75

Jean-Baptiste's approach to identity via language, then, does not aim at erecting borders or clear-cut boundaries between Québec and the rest of Canada as Marie does; rather, his conception of identity is inclusive of Otherness.

Jean-Baptiste' role as a translator between Aline and his mother reflects his attempts to break down those borders within the domestic sphere first. He is the only character within the novel who fully assimilates what it means to be at the margins, ignored, and debased due to cultural and linguistic divides. Since her arrival at the

Desouches' home, Aline has the impression that she "landed in a foreign country" as most of them speak English, which, for her, is the "language of employers, bankers and politicians, not the language of friends or relatives" (8). Having noticed Aline's alienation, which to some extent reflects Jean-Baptiste's own alienation within Québec as a whole, he decides to intervene despite his "broken" French and thus attempts to break the bitter silences between Aline and his mother. Through his awkward and inauthentic translation (a role that he no longer feels at ease with), he succeeds to bridge the linguistic gap that exists between Aline his mother. Such a symbolic dialogue and communication become a vehicle to overcome the salient divisions and conflicts that emerge between both communities living in the same country:

> Jean-Baptiste had become the link between the two women, translating freely for each what the other had said, But because he resented this position immediately, this extra burden imposed on him by their ignorance of each other's language, he took to translating quite freely indeed. Usually he would deliver intact the general idea of their statements, but often in a way which he knew would incense them unexpectedly. 40-1

In *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City* (2006), Sherry Simon contends that translation as a vehicle that facilitates this movement from one language to another can have "the double force of a transfiguration, the power to dislocate the self as it displaces language. In deviant, excessive acts of interlinguistic creation, the displacement is intensified. The self is enhanced as languages are crossed and mixed" (120). Through his casual, free attempts at navigating between French and English, he succeeds in disrupting the "straight and narrow path, revealing an unsuspected capacity for playful creativity" (Simon 119). He thus seems to alter and more particularly transgress

the conventional function of this act itself in a manner that seeks to deny translation a "point of rest but that in some way trouble the expected goals of language exchange" (120). One could thus say that Jean-Baptiste's tendency to transgress the rules and conventions of translation reflects his world vision that transcends borders and limitations either between geographical spaces or between races: "By this time Aline had said, 'Que c'est froid, tellement froid!' often enough that Jean-Baptiste no longer had to translate it as 'It's too fucking cold' for Mother. Nor had he to translate Mother's 'It's like a grave in here' for Aline" (40). Translation becomes a "moment of rupture in the fabric of the novel, just as language in the city of Montréal is a monstrous combination of disparate parts conjoined as one" (Beneventi 7). Jean-Baptiste realizes that translation offers up only a transient solution to the language barrier at home; the same language barrier exists beyond the home and could thus engender further isolation and separation between the two women and/or adjacent neighbours living side by side and belonging to the same country. Basilières might thus be suggesting that language barrier could be overcome, not through an accurate translation, but through learning and opening to each other's language and, above all, knowing each other's culture.

CONCLUSION

The Québécois struggle for sovereignty, as depicted in the main texts discussed in this thesis, fails to attain its political goal of separation. Its failure could be inferred from the ending of both texts. In *Léolo*, in particular, the protagonist who was enthusiastically and restlessly engaged in a symbolic war against the figures of power and authority either inside or outside the home (e.g., his father/grandfather, the church, the school, the psychiatric hospital, etc.) ends, like all the other members of his family, in a psychiatric ward. His choice of withdrawal from life as a whole signals not only his inability to face the harsh reality to which he was exposed, but also his total rejection of that reality since recourse to dreams becomes a sort of leitmotif within the narrative: "Parce que moi je rêve. Moi je ne le suis pas."

Or, perhaps, his withdrawal could be explained by the fact that such reality is utterly different from what he aspires or dreams for, which materializes only in his unique world of dreams. In this regard, his dream of sovereignty, liberty, and wealth that is rendered possible only in that world of fantasy and imagination is shattered as soon as he returns and embraces the real, static world where he actually lives. The profoundly alienated and dislocated Léo, thus, cannot fully ignore or totally escape the impact of reality upon his disturbed/unstable psyche. As soon as he stops to take refuge in both his world of dreams and in his love of Bianca, he succumbs to his family's inherited illness that he fights hard to escape.

More precisely, his failed attempt to murder his grandfather precipitates his mental breakdown and his surrender to madness. In Léo's view, the grandfather is responsible for passing on the pathological gene, which implies the inability of the Québécois male figure and/or ancestor to deliver the nation from the extended

colonial/imperial grip. So is he a rival for his distant love for Bianca. When Léo realizes that she easily yielded to his grandfather's erotic sexual desires in exchange for money, he stops loving her and stops dreaming as well. In fact, his ideal image of pure love is suddenly broken: "Parce que moi je rêve, moi je ne le suis pas. Parce que je rêve. Je rêve. Parce que je m'abandonne la nuit dans mes rêves avant qu'on ne me laisse le jour parce que je n'aime pas. Parce que j'ai peur d'aimer, je ne rêve plus, je ne rêve plus."

When love and dreams (Léo's two significant survival mechanisms) cease to exist in his fragile world, he immediately gives in; in other words, Léo lacks the power and courage needed to cope with his shocking and hard-to-digest reality, a reality that has stolen away his childhood and made him look much more older than his age. Throughout the film, Léo wears clothes that are far too big for him to underline a childhood that is cut short by an unexpected and abrupt passage to adulthood and, above all, by an extreme lack of a healthy and safe environment for learning and growth. Yet, Lauzon's most unexpected ending reveals to us a drastically new Léo - a Léo that undoes and obliterates a whole journey of struggle and resistance to hegemonic order and oppressive power figures. His final, deteriorated state might concomitantly indicate his inability to overpower the hardly visible and potent system of cultural/political hegemonies and power that ruthlessly stifle his desire for change, freedom, and liberty. If one considers the final impression and the final close-up that focuses upon Léo's face and protruding eyes, one could undoubtedly sense Léo's feelings of amazement, awe, and dismay at his inability to break free of this most allusive power that is omnipresent.[14]

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[14] As Foucault explains, the "omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from

Léo's tragic and inordinate end is bewildering. What does it truly insinuate? Does it reflect Léo's refusal to grow up in a hegemonic society? Does it suggest an unpromising, pessimistic view of the future or a deliberate will of self-destruction and self-effacement? Or, does it simply allude to the futility and inefficiency of dreams to offer unremitting transcendence? Notably, the final scene of the film equally takes us from the culturally deprived home of Léo that contains only one book to the Word Tamer's basement, a space packed with books and classical statuary. This drastic movement might suggest that real resistance could be maintained as well as strengthened through mastering language - the power of words; that is, through deploying this new device or means of communication to address and deal with the internalized tensions and plight of the Québécois society.

As a writer, Léo sets the model for the Québécois subject to follow. His avant-garde work is indeed a trenchant challenge to social inequalities and rampant social injustices, as it is a subtle critique of the colonial/imperial order and cultural hegemony, especially the colonizer's relentless endeavours to undermine or contain the Québécois struggle for freedom and sovereignty. At the closing scene, the Word-Tamer ultimately breaks out of his symbolic silence and reads out loud the last words inscribed by Léolo: "Et j'irai me reposer, la tête entre les deux mots, dans la vallée des avalés." Then, with a candle in his hand that might be suggestive of the hitherto undying glimmer of hope that

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everywhere. And 'power,' insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities…power is not an institution, and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (*Sexuality* 95).

speaks in the language of liberty and freedom, he moves to place *Léolo* side by side with *L'Avalée des avalés*.

The act of writing, then, stands out as the only and most effective means of struggle; it opens a new path towards self-assertion and self-affirmation especially that this means of communication is under the control of the colonizer, so the "seizing of the means of communication and the liberation of post-colonial writing by the appropriation of the written word become crucial features of the process of self-assertion and the ability to reconstruct the world as an unfolding historical process" (Ashcroft et al. 81). Writing, in this sense, signals re-gaining or exerting control over language and communication as symbols of power and agency. Valérie Raoul illustrates the importance of journal writing, during this specific moment, in stressing and articulating the problem of Québécois identity. The "first examples of the modern diary form appear in Quebec in 1960s…. The fictional journal emerges as a singularly appropriate medium for the textualisation of the Quebec situation at that time" (10). She further insists that this form of "intimate" writing sets the foundations for the emergence of a new Québécois self - a self entirely different from the previous one and, most importantly, a self that is determined to assert difference. Language thus emerges as a substantial vehicle for asserting subjectivity. As Raoul elucidates:

> The emphasis in previous diary fiction on aspects of subjectivity in relation to difference from the other(s), is amplified by a new awareness of historicity, that is, relation to time, and difference from the previous self. Subjectivity is seen, finally, as dependent not only on the position(s) of self and other, but on language. There is a shift in the relative importance

> accorded to the imaginary (the origin) and the symbolic (the linguistic and social order through which the self is defined). 10

In *Black Bird*, likewise, Basilières' spiral ending attracts attention. Such an ending suggests stasis and denies Québec the possibility of mobility or change. This pattern might also evoke the need for a re-examination and a serious re-thinking of the current, hybrid reality in Québec - a reality that Marie and her cell friends insist upon negating and ignoring. The hybrid characters within the narrative, particularly Jean-Baptiste, exhibit no interest at all in Québec's project of separation, since the current situation necessitates and calls for addressing other significant political and social issues or priorities. One could refer to Jean-Baptiste's restlessness and dissatisfaction with a corrupted political system, censorship, poverty, capitalism, and lack of faith in democracy and democratic institutions. Grandfather's view of this corrupt system that mostly prevails in all Western-industrialized societies merges with that of Jean-Baptiste's and the author himself:

> When I became old enough to vote I was told that I held the power of self-determination in my hand and that democracy would set me free. After I'd cast my vote, I saw that all lawyers were liars, that freely elected governments were not loath to send in the army and that democracy itself was just a slave of capitalism. Basilières 217-18

Jean-Baptiste expresses his dissatisfaction regarding the accumulation of wealth solely in the hands of those who have power - be it Anglophones or Francophones. While wealth provides and insures a successful and comfortable life for the rich, the poor or the masses are exposed to all sorts of hardships, miseries, and pains due to an uneven and unjust division of wealth:

> In Canada and Quebec money had always been and would always remain bilingual. And as always, for those who had it, it provided not only their continuing comfort and success, but also the despair and failure of those who did not. It bought, through the offices of the media, the illusion that if only it were printed in a different language, it would multiply and disperse more evenly and equitably. Basilières 45

Jean-Baptiste could not withhold his wrath and distress at the various cuts and changes that Prof. Woland (the producer of his first play) felt free to exert upon his own words. In fact, Jean-Baptiste is shocked at all the abrupt and drastic alterations that distort the play's "authentic" message. These unexpected changes make the play convey a new political message that is not his - a message that particularly serves the interests and ideologies of mainstream society, which aims at reproducing a system of oppression and exploitation. Jean-Baptiste "threw down the notebook. 'This language I do. Words I write down are mine. You've no right to delete them" (187). These transgressions, however, "convinced him that Woland was a complete idiot who understood nothing" (188). His first experience with Woland has indeed changed Jean-Baptiste's conceptions vis-à-vis free speech in creative works - especially the control and direction to which his play was subjected, which undoubtedly limit and curb his freedom, and by extension, the freedom of all artists regarding what they are entitled to say or not say. Once more, the issue of freedom of speech re-occurs in Basilières' text, especially at the very end of the narrative, to shed light upon the fact that artists' words are severely controlled. Is freedom of speech, then, only a myth we are forced to believe in or feel profoundly proud to cherish as a fundamental right when in fact it does not exist at all?

> Caught in such an uneasy situation, Jean-Baptiste seems much more troubled about his upcoming works and the limited choices he is left with. Ironically, he asserts that such works will focus upon imaginary, or fantastic places and times and will never approach reality or depict it as it is: Enough. From now on he'd write only about other times and other places, preferably places that never really existed, and mix up all the times together whenever it pleased him. And he'd describe only characters who were complete idiots, because everyone who read his work would think they were wise, and therefore that he'd made them up. And events that were clearly impossible, fantastic things out of fairy tales, because people would think they were somehow metaphors for a secret truth. Basilières 310

To a greater extent, Jean-Baptist's priorities resonate with Zoe Whittall's Bottle Rocket Hearts (2007). Like Jean-Baptiste, Whittall's protagonist (Eve)[15] seems most concerned with current social injustices and hegemonies in Québec such as systemic violence against women, and more particularly, systemic violence and lack of tolerance against the LBGTQ community.

Meanwhile, the closing lines of the novel depict Marie (the wild outcast and non-conforming terrorist) in a state of utter fear and confusion, essentially due to the unexpected barricade of Montréal. From that moment onward, Marie anticipates the beginning of her cell's end. Despite all her terrorist performances that mark her as a brave,

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[15] As a lesbian, Eve demonstrats a keen interest in struggling against the unjust oppression, marginalization, and murders amongst the queer community. The novel underlines how the personal and political collide and intensely impact one another; it further stresses the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of love between Eve and her lover Della due to political divides.

potent figure, the Canadian military intervention in Québec makes her sense her cell's, and by implication, Québec's frailty and vulnerability. She immediately recognizes the clear and salient imbalance and uneven power that exist between the two groups:

> She had to get away from everyone. She dashed to the basement and stood in darkness, trying to reconcile her conflicting, charged emotions. She was afraid. Damn it, she was scared. They'd just sent the whole fucking army after her. She paced and stumbled over things. Slowly her eyes grew more accustomed but she hardly noticed…Why did everything turn out so contrary to her expectations? What was it that frustrated her ambitions even in her successes? Basilières 259

The same bitter feelings of an imminent end re-emerges once more after the burial of Cross's corpse - an act that reminds her of her family's notorious job as grave-robbers or criminals and that she is not better than any of them. She even imagines that she herself is dead and all her endeavours to free her home/nation are to no avail. Overwhelmed with a mixed sense of defeat and failure, she lies in the same dark room within the same colonized nation that still wallows in its darkness and immobility:

> She lay in the darkness in the small room without windows, with the knowledge of what she'd done, and felt how airless and hidden and muffled it was in there, as if she herself were dead and in her coffin.
>
> She might as well be dead. She'd failed at everything, had lost everything. Burying Cross had been her only choice, but it was really a stop-gap measure. … someone would find out someday. Even the false wall she'd built for this tiny hole she lay in was only ever supposed to be temporary. Basilières 297-98

Through Basilières' critical tone of Marie's violent acts, he uncovers his underlying voice that radically interrogates and disproves of the use of violence and terror to achieve political ends. The failure of Marie and the *FLQ* as a cell that terrorized and shocked the nation attests to the inadequacy of radical and/or terrorist action to bring about real political change. In a sense, Basilières is likely to underpin the importance and efficiency of diplomatic means or peaceful struggle which constitute the core of activism. He is concomitantly drawing our attention to the fundamental role of creative art, especially writing, in addressing and critiquing current socio-political issues. As discussed earlier, the novel values the power of words to transcend issues of conflict and tension between French/English Canada. One could not deny Jean-Baptiste's brilliant reaction to Marie's derision when she offered him a blank book, which acted as a necessary precursor to his play writing to affirm his agency and self-affirmation. Ablank book, for Jean-Baptiste is:

> a book waiting to be written. It's not simply blank paper,…. It's cut to size and bound in boards because it's a complete object whose leaves follow one another from beginning to end, continuously, like a journey or a lifetime. A blank book is not nothing, it's simply an untaken journey, an unlived life. It's a concrete potentiality and, as such, an invitation and an affirmation. It's an acknowledgement that a book should be written upon it, that it can become anything. It can mean anything. And because its meaning must be physically manifest upon its blank pages, it can mean precisely what its owner-its writer, its reader-wants. The giving of a blank book is the giving of a voice. Basilières 121

Violence and terrorism, as depicted in the novel, can only lead to self-destruction and exacerbate the already tense relations between the two communities who continue to live side by side. The question, however, remains: what if diplomatic means fail to attain the desired goals? Are there any other alternatives than the use of violence or other terrorist acts to make one's voice heard? Through both the textual/visual analysis of *Léolo* and *Black Bird*, the carnivalesque emerges as that most needed alternative. Without doubt, the carnivalesque remains an effective mode of social, cultural, and political critique that could profoundly shake, destabilise, and even corrode the system. The characters, in Lauzon's and Basilières' texts, are placed under a rigid system that limits their intentions and desire for change or social mobility; yet, they never give up or succumb to its overwhelming power; they always find a way out through myriad-carnivalesque attitudes and behaviour that not only challenge, but also mock and ridicule those established/fixed codes and norms that tend to control, silence, oppress, and coerce them into accepting the status quo.

Léolo, for instance, exhibits a remarkable defiance to all figures of authority. His rebellion and refusal to abide or conform to the imposed social rules begins at home. Indeed, he never abides by the rules and/or rituals of his authoritative parents; rather, he constantly breaks them. In one of the striking scenes of the film where the children are all lined up to receive the administrated laxatives, and despite the father's overdue control of his children's tongues, Léo never swallows them. He even mocks his family's belief that associates daily bowel movements with health since the reality at home speaks of a shocking truth: "Ma grand-mère avait convaincu mon père que la santé venait en chiant." He also transgresses his father's rigid boundary control through his regular visits to his sisters both at home and at the psychiatric hospital. Much more importantly, and despite

his abysmal reality, Léo manages to create an alternative world in his dreams and imagination that stands out as a necessary source of empowerment and hope. This world, though imaginary, indeed reflects his latent desire for a free nation and free movement within a nation that he can call his. Admittedly, the recurrence of the scene where Léo runs enthusiastically in the vast valleys of Italy powerfully mirrors that subconscious desire for freedom and liberty within his own home/nation. By and large, all these symbolic transgressive movements, brilliantly and dynamically performed by Léo, are forms of resistance to dominant power figures and power structures. Throughout the film, one could notice how the "notions of power inherent in the model of centre and margin are appropriated and so dismantled" (Aschcroft et al. 82). Another salient form of resistance that is closely linked to the carnivalesque occurs in the scene where Léo imagines himself in a power position as a king of Italy. These key inversions and subversions of hierarchical roles dramatize Léo's desire to suppress social differences and hierarchies or the rigid binaries between the high and the low. Similarly, the underwater scenes evoke the same goals, but, more emphatically, call for the necessity to bridge the huge chasm that exists between the upper/lower classes. That particular scene simultaneously implies that the poor, too, have the right to live and enjoy all the luxuries of life exactly like the rich. In other words, the poor should not be denied or deprived of their "right" to social mobility as long as they work hard and deploy all means possible to break free of poverty - as all the works in this corpus suggest.

The carnivalesque strategies deployed by Basilières' characters are forms of resistance, too, directed against the same oppressive colonial and class system that denies them freedom, change, and social mobility. Yet, the carnivalesque way through which the characters break established laws, and their indulgence in all that civil society abhors, turn

out to be effective in reacting to or dealing with an oppressive society and its imposed, stifling pattern of stasis. Like Léo, the characters in Basilières' text begin their struggle against oppressive figures of power and authority from the borders of their domestic home. The Desouches indeed attempt to re-create a space that allows for much more liberty and freedom of movement, which materializes through their endless projects of construction and renovation. Not surprisingly, the characters' movement outside of home marks an aberrant defiance to dominant structures of power. Grand-father and Uncle's night work as grave-robbers, which begins when all the others are asleep, reveals how far these characters can go in their relentless struggles or endless battles against social injustices and dispossession within their imperial/colonial context. Marie's resistance against this suffocating colonial context is extreme and typically carnivalesque, for, according to her, terrorism is the only way out of the on-going colonial reality that refuses to end or completely disappear. Surprisingly, however, through Marie's attempt to liberate herself as well as her colonised nation from marginalization and exclusion, she herself ends up being exclusive and intolerant of difference and Otherness; her rigid view of identity poses a real problem within the novel, mainly because of the issue of multiculturalism that foregrounds the importance of tolerance and acceptance of Otherness. The Other, as Kristeva argues, is part of us: "Living with the other, with the foreigner, confronts us with the possibility, or not, of being an other. It is not simply – humanistically - a matter of being able to accept the other but of being in his place, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself" (*Strangers* 13).

Yet, as a female character, Marie does not aspire to be like her mother. Her abortion challenges a system that values women's reproductive role within society. She refuses to perpetuate or reproduce the same subordinate position of her mother that, equally, implies

conforming to societal/patriarchal rules. She rather aspires to have a leading position within a sovereign Québec. Hence, as she realizes that her terrorist acts fail to attain the expected goals, she nonetheless feels much more determined to go forward in her political struggles and devote her entire life to her cause. For Marie, resistance does not end, but will just begin - albeit on different terms:

> Now she knew how hard her task would be. How foolish she'd been to think that a mere few years of campaigning would shift the balance between the great forces of Change and Inertia.
>
> And that's what she was really fighting. Not just money and social conventions and apathy: Inertia. But now she saw the opposition as people just like herself- if only they knew it- people who had given their lives up to their own causes, people who'd been unknowingly mastered by their own ideals. Basilières 231-32

The theories employed in the course of this analysis, notably the Bakhtinian theory of the carnivalesque, Foucauldian theory, post-colonial theory, and psychoanalysis deeply inform my understanding of the limitations imposed by dominant power structures as well as dominant discourses upon the inner/outer space of individuals to further control the masses. Yet, regardless of how potent the system is, the characters in the texts under study are engaged in a symbolic war against the system and somewhat succeed in creating their own space of survival through transgressive or carnivalesque acts that defy and calls into question the excessive marginalization, oppression, and exclusion of the poor, women, and the abject/alien Others in so-called democratic, inclusive nations.

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